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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 18 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 18 septembre 1997

The House met at 1001.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (LICENCE SUSPENSIONS), 1997

LOI DE 1997 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (SUSPENSIONS DE PERMIS)

Mr Grimmett moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 154 An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to the suspension of drivers' licences / Projet de loi 154., Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les suspensions de permis de conduire.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): It's a pleasure for me to open debate on Bill 154, my private member's bill. The bill has been fairly heavily circulated and most of the members will know this, but I don't think it's a problem for me to repeat what the bill tries to do.

Currently, if people are convicted of impaired boating they lose their privilege to operate a boat for a period of time, but there is no sanction against their driver's licence. This act would, upon conviction either of impaired boating or blowing over 80 on a breathalyser or refusing to blow, remove the privileges of the convicted person to drive their automobile for a minimum one-year period.

Before I embark on an argument to persuade all the members to support the bill, I'd like to give some thanks to people who have helped me in my preparation and research, including Susan Swift of the legislative research service, who provided me with a great deal of background information on this issue, and from the Attorney General's ministry, Caroline Pinto, Michael Wood and Sheilagh Stewart, who helped with the drafting of the bill. Also, officials with the Ministry of Transportation and the Solicitor General and the Ontario Provincial Police have been very helpful in helping me put this bill together.

I thought I would speak for a moment about my own experience as a boater. I've been quite surprised at the bad boating habits of people in the vicinity of my riding in Muskoka-Georgian Bay. As a person who occasionally boats with my family, I find it quite alarming that when the Canadian Coast Guard did a survey of boaters across Canada recently they found that 37% of those people who boat indicated they drink alcoholic beverages every time they go boating, and about 66% of people who boat in Canada occasionally or regularly drink alcoholic beverages while they are boating.

I think this is an indication of lack of sensitivity by boaters to the issue of alcohol and boating and how they don't mix well. I also feel that there is in my riding a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the judicial system and the way it deals with impaired boaters, particularly with some of the high-profile accidents that have occurred on the water in recent years in Muskoka-Georgian Bay, where unfortunately the boat operators who were in the wrong received little or no sanction after the act, although there were some very serious victims in many of these incidents.

I don't know whether I can say that the number of bad accidents on the water in Ontario is increasing, but they seem to happen with regularity. I think it's time that we sent out a message to all people who boat in Ontario that there will be a very significant penalty if they choose to mix alcohol with their boating.

The statistics kept by the Ontario Provincial Police indicate that about 40% of all fatal boating accidents are alcohol-related, and that's a similar ratio to what occurs in automobile accidents. Currently we focus a good deal of attention on impaired motorists and I think it's time we levelled the playing field so that people who choose to drink alcohol and put others at risk while they're operating a boat be given similar attention. I think it's noteworthy that in Ontario currently if you're convicted of being impaired while operating a snowmobile, you lose your driver's licence.

I know from talking to the police that on most occasions when they find the operator of a boat has been drinking excessively and they indicate they will be charging them with impaired operation, the first question that's asked is, "I'm not going to lose my driver's licence, am I?" It is a tool the police want to have. They feel it's a tool that will help to discourage people from engaging in this kind of activity.

The other thing the bill would do is give police officers the ability to suspend for a 12-hour period the driver's licence of anyone involved in this kind of offence, even if they blow only a warning on the roadside breathalyser test. I think this is something the public would support strongly because it would take away the possibility of the

person in the boat driving a car for a 12-hour period. I think in many cases the police would find it to be an adequate remedy, rather than going through the lengthy and sometimes frustrating process of an impaired charge.

The bill I am presenting today has provisions in it that have already been enacted in three other provinces. Alberta, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have been suspending the driver's licence of persons convicted of impaired operation of a vessel for some time, and several states have enacted this kind of legislation.

At present, an individual convicted of operating a vessel while impaired is prohibited from operating a vessel for a minimum of three months for the first offence, six months for the second and one year for the third offence. The maximum prohibition from operating a vessel under the Criminal Code is three years. Under the current system, if you're convicted of impaired operation of a water vessel you can leave the courthouse, jump in your car and drive away.

I think the tougher sentences that have been imposed on impaired operators of motor vehicles have had some effect. I know that in the 24 years I've had a driver's licence in Ontario, I have noted among my friends and in the communities in which I've lived an increased awareness of the perils of drinking and driving. You will know, from talking to people who operate restaurants and bars, that people who are driving have a tendency either to have a designated driver or they don't consume as much alcohol. This is the kind of the thing that we have to impress upon the boating community and I think this bill would do that.

The effects of alcohol on operating a vessel are worthy of note, and this has been studied by the Canadian Coast Guard and many experts in the field. If a person has been consuming alcohol when they're going boating, they're going to have to deal with the problems that alcohol creates in their body. One is that it affects the balance. When you're in a boat your balance is already going to be more unstable than it is in a car, and if you've been drinking, your balance is not going to be as good.

1010

It affects your judgement. It reduces your inhibitions and it can cause normally cautious people to take more risks. Given that 37% of boaters have admitted that they drink and operate boats, it's a scary thought to think, when you're out in a boat with your family, that the judgement of a third of the boaters out there is affected by alcohol.

Studies have also indicated that when you're drinking alcohol, your vision is impaired. It has an effect not only on your peripheral vision but also on your ability to see certain colours. Two of the colours that have been identified are red and green, and of course, as people who boat will know, those are used as running lights on boats and they're also the colour of navigation markers out there. So it is quite a matter of concern that boaters would have their vision affected by their drinking.

Another effect is the reaction time. You will not have the ability to react quickly if you need to, as you often do in a boat.

I've been quite encouraged by the support I've received on this bill. The Ontario Provincial Police has been in touch with me on a constant basis. I've also had a voice mail message from the father of a victim of a boating accident all the way from Massachusetts, and today in the members' gallery we have with us many members of the group Mothers Against Drunk Driving, including Mr John Bates, who himself was a victim of a boating accident involving alcohol. Also in the gallery is Mr David Stewart, the president of the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving, who is supporting the bill, and his executive assistant, Ann Leonard.

I've also heard supporting encouragement from the Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons, the Georgian Bay community policing group and many individuals, both in my riding and in other parts of the province.

Personally, I feel this is a tool that the police have long asked for. They expect that this will have an impact on the attitudes people have when they are embarking on a boating voyage. I was myself out in a boat doing a cable TV show with our local MP and the police in Gravenhurst Bay in the spring of this year. It was a lovely day. The police pulled three boats over, and the third boat was full of beer and the people had been drinking at 11 o'clock in the morning. So it's a very common practice and it's something we need to do something about. Send a message to those people out there that they cannot drink and operate a boat.

Ms Annamarie Castrilli (Downsview): I'm pleased to speak in favour of this private member's legislation which would considerably tighten the rules for those who recklessly abuse their boating privilege — and it is a privilege we're talking about. When one abuses their privilege by consuming alcohol, there ought to be penalties that follow because we must never forget that this is not a right but a privilege.

It's important to remember that while police enforcement is less stringent on water, boaters still have a responsibility for their own safety and recreation must be combined with responsibility.

Bill 154 represents an effort by the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay to respond to the concerns of his constituents. He points out, quite wisely, that there is a linkage between the irresponsible use of a boat and of a motor vehicle. Those who consume alcohol on a boat may well have consumed alcohol in advance of being on the vessel and therefore that is something that needs to be considered.

The proposed legislation addresses the problem in two ways. There's a short-term and a long-term issue. In the first instance, if a person's breathalyser reaches a warning or a charge were to be laid, enforcement officers would have the ability to suspend a boater's driver's licence for a 12-hour period. It would also suspend a person's driver's licence if convicted under the Criminal Code for impaired boating.

The major purpose of Bill 154, of course, is to act as a deterrent. The member has pointed out that there are three other provinces and six states that have enacted legislation

similar to this. It's not clear, though, whether there has been any assessment of whether it has proven to be a deterrent, but one can imagine that it might have. I think it would useful at some other time to see what the impact of that legislation has been in those states.

I commend the member as well for being very thorough in providing excellent statistics that he has culled from marine statistics. It's obvious that there is a need to do something in this area which has been left unattended for a very long time. There are about 150 people a year charged with the impaired operation of vessels as it is. I'd say this seems a rather low number.

In looking at the figures I have, page 2 of the member's question-and-answer handout which he was very kind to give to us, he mentions statistics from the Canadian Coast Guard which found that 37% of Canadian boaters report that they consume alcohol always before boating and that 66% consume alcohol always or sometimes. This is before boating. Those are pretty shocking statistics and so it strikes me as odd that only 150 people would be charged, given the statistics which have been presented from the Canadian Coast Guard.

The figure may well be low because there was a difficulty with enforcement of provisions that currently exist, and this is really the heart of the matter. I'm very much in favour of this legislation because these cause such tremendous damage: 40% of those who were killed in boating accidents are found to have had a great deal of alcohol in their bloodstream. There is clearly a relationship between accidents and alcohol, so I'm surprised that only 150 people would be charged in any one year. The answer of course is that we do not have the enforcement mechanisms in this province, and that has only been made worse in the last couple of years.

The Ontario Provincial Police have been diminished so that you do not have the kind of enforcement you would like. You might say, "Maybe you could expand the enforcement activities to allow employees with the Ministry of Natural Resources who have charge of parks and provincial lakes and campgrounds" —and there too we find that there have been tremendous cuts in staffing. There is no capacity to enforce legislation which currently exists. That's the problem.

The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay has an excellent piece of legislation, but if it remains just a piece of paper, it will look wonderful on the member's résumé, it will look wonderful in the annals of this Legislature, but it will do nothing to change the statistics we have; it will do absolutely nothing to change the deaths that are occurring with great alarm. That's really the issue.

I say to the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, I'm prepared to support your legislation, but I would like to see a commitment from this government to enforcement of the legislation. I'd like to make sure that we have fewer accidents and that we have fewer deaths as a result of your well-meaning piece of legislation. It has to have some teeth, and the teeth come from enforcement.

1020

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): I'm going to speak to this, obviously in support of it and with the intention of voting for it.

Of course, the sponsor of the bill made reference to the Criminal Code and the fact that prohibitions can be imposed by a sentencing judge. Interestingly, though, the Criminal Code only permits a prohibition of operating a vessel upon a conviction for operating a vessel. It doesn't permit the cross-prohibitions.

The Criminal Code prohibitions carry with them far more significant sanctions than the province, I suspect, is entitled to impose by virtue of its limited jurisdiction. I would invite the member to encourage federal counterparts to consider an amendment to the Criminal Code to permit the cross-prohibitions. I have no doubt there are going to be lawyers who argue the appropriateness of the Highway Traffic Act imposing a suspension of a driver's licence when the offence was one that wasn't related to highway traffic. God bless, they'll argue that and they'll litigate it and the judges will decide.

The rationale is that if somebody cannot exercise sufficient good judgement to not operate a motorized vehicle, be it a water vehicle, a vessel, an airplane, a skidoo, a snowmobile or a motor vehicle, in one context, can they be trusted to exercise better judgement in another context? If they have poor judgement on the waterways, can they be expected to exercise good judgement on the roadways? That's the obvious rationale and perhaps one of the arguments that would be offered in the case of any challenge to the legality of this particular amendment.

I also have, though, concerns about not the enforceability but the capacity to enforce. We've witnessed increasing penalties for drunk drivers, yet we witness annually numbers of apprehensions. One has to shake one's head because you wonder, how much stricter does the penalty have to get before people, or at least certain people or a certain segment of our community, get the message? I suspect that you reach a point of marginal return where you can no longer address the matter of penalty but you've got to start thinking about the fact that the likelihood of detection becomes the major deterrent.

The fact is that every drunk driver who does get caught didn't expect to run into an ALERT machine or a roadside breath-testing operation. The fact is that most drunks operating motor boats or Sea-Doos, those types of things, don't expect — quite frankly, most of them know there's little likelihood of detection, because if they're familiar with certain areas of their cottage country or recreational country, they know whether or not the police are out there patrolling.

I have some concerns — and I invite the member to speak to this — because I know down in Niagara region where Niagara Regional Police have to police two lakes and share the policing of one waterway, the Niagara River, they've expressed to me great concern about their capacity to do effective policing on those waterways — on Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the Niagara River.

There's clearly got to be a need to enhance the enforcement, to increase the likelihood of detection. At some point that's where more attention has to be diverted because you've maximized or at least optimized the penalties and the deterrent impact the penalties alone could have.

We've still got to address attitudes and public education. Clearly this is a bill that isn't solely related to cottage country but has significant impact on cottage country. Let's understand that, at the same time as we're standing here condemning drunk driving on waterways, drunk operation of motor boats and speedboats and Sea-Doos, we're struggling with incredibly powerful and effective advertising and mindset campaigns, in no small part by the beer industry itself, campaigns that in my view and in the view of a whole lot of other people are directed primarily at young, and younger, people.

Watch your television, the nature of summertime beer ads and the length that these operators, Molson, Labatt, the whole gang of them, want to make between cottage life and drinking beer. Of course, they're very careful. They've become oh so cautious about making sure they don't show somebody sitting on a speedboat — I guess your steering wheel's on the right-hand side — holding a beer in their left hand, but the case or keg of beer is sitting there on the dock. You can't escape the inference that they want people to draw, and that is that a cold beer is part and parcel of enjoying your weekend at the cottage.

Let's go one further. Molson, Labatt, the whole gang of them will argue, very much as cigarette manufacturers argue, "We don't force people to overconsume." You've heard the defences in some of the litigation that's arisen in the States: "We don't tell people because if you only smoke five cigarettes a day" — and I suppose the statistics demonstrate this — "your likelihood of getting lung cancer or other diseases is far less than the two- and three-pack-a-day smoker."

Let's be honest. The beer industry doesn't make money off people who drink two or three beers a week, any more than the tobacco industry makes money off people who only smoke two, three, four or five cigarettes a day. It's absolute hogwash. The industry would be devastated if all Ontarians were but even one-case-a-month beer drinkers. The industry would be finished. It couldn't maintain the economies it has to maintain to carry on its business. The industry is selling an addictive substance and it's selling and marketing it in such a way that notwithstanding their hogwash about drinking responsibly — and I've seen the blood ads that they've engaged in where they've tried to placate the criticism of that industry.

The fact is, that industry very much wants to expand its already large market. It looks to young people as a means of doing that. I mentioned the cottage ads, the lifestyle ads. Witness again the attempt to lure young people into the perception that drinking, and I suppose what young people might call party drinking, you know, the two-fisted kind of drinking — witness the rock-and-roll-themed ads that are associated very much with the beer industry, very sophisticated, very slick, very expensive ads, and I have no doubt all with actors, persons playing roles in these ads who are of age. You take a look and you can't help but think that some of them were actually selected to appear perhaps even younger than their actual age. They're appealing very much to a very vulnerable market and one which continues to succumb.

We have to look at the whole issue of drinking and driving, in the sense that I don't care whether it's a motor boat, a car, a motorcycle, a Sea-Doo or an airplane, what have you. Obviously one of the problems that a whole lot of people have is trying to calculate the numbers: "Let's see. I've had two beers in the course of two hours. Am I over 80 or under 80?" You've encountered that, I'm sure, that argument and that effort to try analyse exactly where you stand, to try to slide in under the wire.

Quite frankly, I think John Bates and MADD and his colleagues have had a whole lot to do with changing perception. You, Mr Grimmett, made reference to an earlier time when the phenomenon of drunk driving was regarded as often as not the next day with a chuckle and an elbow in the ribs about how you managed to make it home, albeit one-eyed and albeit on the wrong side of the road. I think those attitudes have changed a great deal, in that it's no longer a subject of mirth or joviality. Not that it doesn't happen, but it's not something people are inclined to brag about to their colleagues or co-workers or friends the next morning or the next evening. That was the result of some significant education going on in the public and a change of attitudes, but I don't think that same level of education and change in attitude has taken place with respect to boating and the boating community. They're somehow regarded as distinct.

I refer to lakes more than rivers because of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario down where I live. Lakes are huge, massive places and it seems as if you could weave and curve and sway all you wanted without hitting any victims. The fact is that drinking while operating a vessel is a highly dangerous activity, dangerous of course to the persons in the boat itself and dangerous to other persons who have every right to use those waterways. It's important that the alcohol industry — the beer industry in particular, because the spirits industry has been far less successful at making its product attractive to new, ingenue drinkers, to the tyros, the neophytes of the drinking community — take some real heat. They've got to be required to accept some real responsibility and to acknowledge that whatever percentage of their revenues they invest in anti-drunk-driving campaigns doesn't begin to arrest the impact of very powerful advertising campaigns which are undeniably focused on a very vulnerable group; to wit, young people.

1030

If we're going to have laws like this, and if they are laws that are going to be held in some regard by the public — I go back to the issue of enforcement — we've got to give cops in our communities the tools to enforce this. Police forces across this province find themselves increasingly stressed in terms of person-power and the capacity to put people out there on the street, and also

stressed in the capacity to acquire the types of equipment, in this case motorboats, that you need to be out there on the lakes and rivers and so on policing the activities of boaters.

You can pass all the laws you want, but if the law is understood — and the public is increasingly conscious of the absence of police officers out there. If the bad guys only knew how few cops there are out on the road in any given numbers of communities at any given point in time, the consequences would be scary. I mentioned that to police officers and they assured me that the bad guys indeed do know and are incredibly sophisticated at avoiding detection because they're well aware of police forces increasingly underresourced here in Ontario.

Quite frankly, it's not a matter of doing more with less. Policing is a labour-intensive activity. Police officers deserve to be paid decent wages in view of the types of work and the tasks that they undertake, the risks that they undertake on a daily basis and the high level of professionalism that exists among policing here in Ontario.

We can reduce policing costs even more by simply reducing the number of police officers that are out there. We've already witnessed incredible and tragic increases in response time by police forces, through no fault of their own, across the province. I'm most familiar of course with the consequences of the destaffing, the defunding, in Niagara region. I speak with police officers there on a regular basis and I hear the stories as frequently.

If people want, and I think Ontarians do, to be protected from that outlaw element of our community — and yes, I put drunk drivers in the same boat, if you will. If people want to be protected from those, and I believe they do, people have got to be prepared to invest in the resources that are going to enable them to be protected. That means this government has got to be prepared to invest in policing. This government talks a big game about law and order, but it fails to deliver in terms of getting right down to the real issues.

We support the bill. I applaud it. But I ask you please to consider the issues we've raised in relationship to it.

Mr Allan K. McLean (Simcoe East): Today I have the honour of standing in support of Bill Grimmett's — the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay's — amendment to the Highway Traffic Act with respect to the suspension of drivers' licences of individuals convicted under the Criminal Code of impaired operation of a vessel. Anything to do with boater safety, I can tell you, I support.

We don't have to be told that drinking and then driving a car is a deadly combination. Statistics show us grim numbers every year and we see the devastating results on the 6 o'clock news.

Ministry of Transportation statistics show that, on average, 60 people die every year in boating accidents in this province. That is not acceptable to me, it's not acceptable to the people of Ontario, and I'm sure it's not acceptable to any member in this Legislature.

Our Minister of Transportation has made it clear he expects firm action when a driver is found to be over the legal limit. If a driver of an automobile or a motorized snowmobile is found guilty and penalized with a licence suspension, the person's right to operate a water vehicle should also be denied.

Drinking and driving don't mix; drinking and boating don't mix. Alcohol and the operation of any motorized vehicle are a deadly combination. The penalty for breaking this law should be the same: vehicle licence suspension.

Currently, when someone is found guilty of operating a water vessel while impaired, they pay a fine, leave the courtroom and drive their car home. By the same token, a person found guilty of impaired operation of an automobile will have their licence suspended, will leave the courtroom, take a bus home, and will still be able to drive their boat on Ontario's lakes and waters. This is an irresponsible motor vehicle and water vessel operator. They should not be allowed to operate any type of motorized vehicle until their penalty has been served and they have proven themselves a responsible operator.

Alberta, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, as well as several American states, have enacted legislation suspending a person's driver's licence on conviction of the impaired operation of a vessel. This bill is supported by the OPP, who feel there will be no additional workload on front-line policing, since they already have the equipment and training needed to deal with impaired boaters. It was just two years ago that I was stopped by the OPP on the water. Just this past summer I was stopped by the Ministry of Natural Resources people on the water. So they are out there and I appreciated their visit.

I've worked for most of my term as an MPP to have all water craft operators take a vehicle safety course before venturing out on to Ontario's lakes and rivers. However, all the safety courses in existence cannot create a safe boater out of an impaired boater. Tragedies and fatalities on the waterways are no more acceptable than tragedies and fatalities on our highways. We must act, and act now, to educate boaters and enact tough penalties for impaired operators. I agree with the quote from the marine operator in a Peterborough newspaper when she said, "We've got idiots behind the wheels of cars and we've got idiots driving boats."

The marine industry promotes boater safety; distillers promote boater safety; the municipalities, law enforcement, public health and safety groups also promote boater safety. As an example, this summer, Labatt's, in partnership with the Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons, launched a WaterWise Boat Pro education campaign in Ontario. They worked together to heighten awareness of boating safety and responsible alcohol use. In July, Labatt's was joined by the OPP and the Ontario Marina Operators Association to remind boaters never to operate a vessel while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, along with promoting many other boating rules of the waterway.

We have regulations. We need to add education and tough penalties, like the suspension of drivers' licences, for persons convicted of dangerous operation of motor-

boats, including personal watercraft, while under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

For some time, some nine years now, I've been promoting boater safety and education. Two weeks ago I had a resolution hoping that we could get the amendment to the small vessels regulations to have certificates issued to boaters. It was raised in the House with regard to who's going to issue the certificates and how it is going to operate. It's a federal law, but I would be happy if the province took the responsibility to issue the certificates to make sure that people operating a water vessel have had a test.

Really, what I'm looking at is the same as individuals who would get a driver's licence: They go and write an exam. That's what I would like to see, that boaters who are operating on our waterways today have that certificate. I would certainly be happy to grandfather that for three years, which my resolution spoke on, to allow those boat operators to have three years to get their certificate.

We need overall boating safety in this province. We have manuals, we have the boating manual, the pro boat manual, we have a booklet on boating essentials which is taught in Georgian College in Orillia, we have the tools, we have the power squadrons. We need to educate the voters in this province. I commend the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay for bringing Bill 154 forward so that the police will have more authority on our waterways.

1040

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Let me first of all say that I concur with the last speaker when he said we certainly need to do a lot more by way of education. I think it's a lot like the impaired driving situation or the drinking and driving situation. I can recall 30 or 40 years ago it was certainly much more acceptable for a person to drink and then to get behind the wheel of a car. I'm not saying they were necessarily all impaired, but it was an acceptable way for society to deal with those situations.

Now it's no longer acceptable. It's no longer acceptable to drink and drive. I think, particularly with young people, it has become quite acceptable to have a designated driver so that when they go out partying that individual doesn't drink at all. I would commend the young people on that. I think this is as a result of an education process that has taken many years to develop, but it has become part of the social conscience of a lot of the young people in our society. We need to do the same sort of thing with boating safety, because it is just as unacceptable to get in the boat and start driving it — you don't drive a boat, but start riding it or whatever — as it is to do so behind the wheel of a car.

The statistic the member for Muskoka has brought forward that almost 37% of the people who get behind the wheel of a boat always drink before doing so is surely totally unacceptable. I think a lot of the advertising, as the member for Welland talked about, is almost predicated on the fact that it's an acceptable thing. You get behind the wheel of a boat, you start drinking and everybody's having a grand old time. I'm sure that is simply not the right way to go about it. We have to spend a lot more time on education, on making sure that it becomes just as unacceptable, particularly for young people but also for older people, to get behind the wheel of a boat as it is to get behind the wheel of a car when you've been drinking.

I would like to turn to one other issue, though, which I think is very closely related to this. We can pass all the laws we want in this chamber and if we don't enforce them properly or correctly, then really we may have done something from a symbolic viewpoint that, yes, we are against drinking and driving whether it's in a boat or whether it's behind the wheel of a car, but if the government of the day doesn't set aside the proper resources to actually make it happen, then all the good intentions of the laws that are passed simply are totally wasted.

I would urge the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay to start taking a look at the OPP budget. When you see that budget has actually been cut over the number of years, specifically when it comes to the aspect of enforcement, then I would ask him to talk to the Solicitor General and say that once this bill is passed, if we want to give it some meaningful enforcement mechanism, let's make sure that the officers are out there on the water doing that sort of thing.

I think it's a lot tougher to catch an impaired driver in a boat than it is in a car. It's much tougher to have RIDE programs and things along those lines to have spot checks. It just doesn't work that way. It doesn't totally surprise me that most of the people who are charged have alcohol in their system, because they're normally charged only after something happens. That happens much more frequently with respect to a boat than it does with a car because you don't have the kind of RIDE programs that you do in driving situations.

I commend the member for bringing this bill forward. I think it makes eminent good sense. An impaired driver behind the wheel of a car or behind the wheel of a boat is just as dangerous to the general public. They have, in effect, a powerful tool in their hands with which they can maim and kill, and I think the same sanctions should apply. But I would urge the member to talk to the Solicitor General to make sure that sufficient resources are available so that the laws we pass in this chamber can be effectively enforced.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): I'm very proud this morning to stand and speak in support of Bill 154. This member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, in my opinion, is one of our new bright lights in our government and this bill manifests his superb intellect and ability. It also demonstrates his compassion not only for the people who die as a result of alcohol-related boating accidents but also for those whose lives are changed forever as a result of permanent injury.

Sixty people died on average in each of the past five years in alcohol-related boating accidents. It is also significant that three other Canadian provinces and several states in the United States have already passed this progressive and very necessary legislation.

Times have changed. As a recreational boater myself for the past 40 years, I've changed my own boating habits.

I don't go out any more after dark on the lakes. I'm very nervous about coming on a boat without lights. You can say it's floating — it's not parked but it's not running — it's drifting in the dark, because of course they're sitting in the boat in the dark, with their lights off, drinking. I just don't go out any more after dark because of that.

The other aspect of boating is, for the most part it is recreational; it's not usually for transportation, except to and from island locations. When you're dealing with recreational boating it usually means it's in combination with visiting and entertaining friends. Quite frankly, alcohol makes a refreshing drink and is far more likely to be served than milk, because obviously the refrigeration requirement isn't the same and it's very easy to keep beer cold on a boat. It's also very easy to have in that kind of environment a lot to drink before people go out boating.

Obviously the penalty for drunk boating is not a deterrent. In fact if you look at the penalty, it's absolutely absurd. The first offence for drunk boating is three months, the second is six months and the third is a year. Isn't that just great. It means that they probably would miss one boating season, so obviously the deterrent is not there at the moment. This private member's bill is a realistic penalty.

Isn't it ironic. I was listening to the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay on the radio this morning, on Metro Morning, and he gave the example of the irony that you can drive a snowmobile on a frozen lake and be charged for impaired driving and lose your driver's licence, yet a few months later when that lake is unfrozen and you're on the same body of water with an individual watercraft or an ordinary boat, you cannot receive the same penalty for drunk driving.

The other point I want to make is that there isn't a question about whether it really makes sense to suspend an individual's motor licence for violations unrelated to the operation of an automobile. The answer to that is very clear in law, and that is that a precedent has already been established in this area in that a motor vehicle licence can be suspended under the Highway Traffic Act for impaired operation of a motorized snow vehicle, although it is not considered a motor vehicle by provincial law. So the precedent is there.

I believe we've made huge progress in this House in the last 12 months in passing legislation to fight drunk driving. Naturally, I had a personal interest in the government legislation because it addressed the concerns that I had brought to this House in my two private member's bills about drunk driving. This morning, the passage of this bill will work as an addition to combat drunk driving on the water as well as on our roads. I sincerely congratulate Bill Grimmett, the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

1050

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Of course I will be, as everybody would be, supporting these bills this morning. I can't think of anybody who is going to oppose them. They are both laudable in terms of the goals they set.

I simply want to set out one of the problems that I see with all this legislation that sounds good, looks good on paper, gets a good headline, and that is that we have to have the resources to carry it out. It is one thing to have a bill on the books. It is another to have the necessary resources to enforce the law. I'm sure that the member who has brought this forward, the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, will be working hard on his cabinet colleagues to ensure that there is adequate provision made in terms of the resources available to enforce it and, if there are more convictions, that the courts will have the resources to proceed with these cases so that those who are in violation are punished in the appropriate fashion.

Right now we've had three Supreme Court justices in Ontario say that the court system is "woefully inadequate" in terms of the financial resources it has to carry out its responsibilities. We are supposed to have, with the addition of some crowns on contract, some 535 crown attorneys to deal with 250,000 charges in the province. I suspect what's going to happen is that we're going to see more plea bargaining taking place and therefore a reduction in the kind of penalties that the member would like to see and I would like to see for violations of the law. Clearly, there is a problem on the water, as there is a problem on highways or across land with snowmobiles, and that problem has to be addressed.

It's the same thing with the victims' rights bill which will be dealt with later. Everybody is on the side of the victims, I'm sure. I have seen personally in my riding some very high-profile cases where victims and their families have been very saddened by what has happened and annoyed with the justice system. I welcomed the initiative by the member for Downsview, Annamarie Castrilli of the Liberal Party, bringing in her bill for victims' rights and then the government essentially adopting that bill and implementing it. What's happened, however, is the resources haven't been there to carry out the provisions of that bill.

While we applaud in this House, while there is a good headline, while there is some nice coverage and some newsletters, what happens down the line is that we start to find out from the victims themselves that it isn't all it's cracked up to be, that the resources aren't there, that the supports aren't there, that the participation they were looking for will not take place. That's what's important. That's what I urge members of the House to be working on: providing those resources.

It's very difficult to give an income tax cut which will cost the treasury $5 billion in lost revenue and most benefit the wealthiest people in our society, to make severe cuts in other areas and still be able to carry out the provisions of this legislation. I'm sure there will be unanimous support for both bills today. I simply urge the members to try hard to get the resources to carry out the bills.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke-Rexdale): It's really a tremendous delight to join in this morning's debate in private members' hour, particularly to focus this Legislature's attention on Bill 154, the member for Muskoka-

Georgian Bay's bill dealing with drunk driving on our waterways.

At the outset I want to say that both the Ministry of Transportation and I personally would like to congratulate the member for bringing this important bill to our attention and commend him for the hard work he has put in on this issue. His riding has the essential recreational water routes to the north and to the south, and I know from speaking with him that he has seen many of these accidents and fatalities impact on his own constituents. I think to a great extent that is what impels him in bringing this bill forward, and for that he needs to be commended.

When I first examined this particular issue, I was absolutely shocked by the statistics of deaths and injuries due to drunk boating on our waterways. As of July this year we've had nearly 44 alcohol-related charges made against boaters. In the same period, seven people unfortunately lost their lives needlessly because of not taking the proper precautions and having this dangerous mix of boating, speeding and drinking. It's an extremely lethal combination. The OPP has estimated that there have been approximately 150 people charged this year with drinking and boating.

Unfortunately, many Canadians associate alcohol and boating as a pleasurable exercise and forget about the statistics. Even the Canadian Coast Guard has noted that an alarming 66% of Canadian boaters report always or nearly always consuming alcohol when boating. Clearly the need to reduce the amount of drinking and boating on Ontario's waterways is an important issue and priority to this government and to the Ministry of Transportation.

As the member for Mississauga South has noted, the effective deterrents aren't there. I think this particular bill is going to pave a very influential way in moving this government towards making a public policy decision on drinking and driving, as we have in the comprehensive road safety bill. Over time we are going to see the inevitability of this kind of bill becoming law in Ontario dealing with drunk driving and boating. The member's efforts in this area are going to prove to be a bold step along that public policy process, in making this particular bill eventually a fruition.

I'd finally like to comment that this government has already dealt with drunk driving on our road system. We have brought in the toughest legislation, under Bill 138, the comprehensive road safety bill, passed in June by this Legislature. The provisions, the philosophy and intent set out in that new bill address when a vehicle driver decides that he or she is going to combine alcohol and driving on our roadways. We're going to have a similar intent follow on the roadways our water system. I'd like to congratulate the member again for bringing forth this bill at this time.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, you have two minutes.

Mr Grimmett: I'll be brief. I would like to thank the members for Downsview, Welland-Thorold, Simcoe East, Mississauga South, Kingston and The Islands, St Catharines and Etobicoke-Rexdale for their supportive comments. I'm encouraged by the fact that they share my concern for safety on the water, which this bill is trying to address. I'd say to those people who raised issues about enforcement that it would be interesting to them to review the statistics available from the Ontario Provincial Police about enforcement on the waterways in recent years. If they look at them closely they'll see that there's been a dramatic increase in the number of charges laid on waterways in Ontario in the seasons of 1996 and 1997 respectively.

Part of this has arisen I think from the passage at the federal level of the Contraventions Act, which was a matter the police had asked for to make it simpler for them to lay minor charges against boating offenders without having to deal through federal legislation.

The police have been asking for the kinds of penalties that are in this bill. They asked for the changes that are in the Contraventions Act, and now that they have got the changes in the Contraventions Act, they have acted on that and there has been a dramatic increase in the number of charges laid. I'm confident that if this bill is able to pass through the Legislature, it will provide the police with the tool they need, and they will be able to carry out the enforcement that's required.

I certainly encourage all members to help ensure that we have safe waterways in Ontario. I think it's essential for our tourism industry that we are able to say to people our waterways are safe, and I think this bill will be one step closer to making sure that we can say to everybody, "Ontario's waterways are safe, and we're doing what we can to prevent bad boating habits."

1100

VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME COMMEMORATION WEEK ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LA SEMAINE DE COMMÉMORATION DES VICTIMES DE CRIMES DE VIOLENCE

Mr Baird moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 155, An Act proclaiming Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week / Projet de loi 155, Loi proclamant la Semaine de commémoration des victimes de crimes de violence.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): The people of Ontario desire to live, work and raise their families in communities free from violent crime. Until that vision becomes a reality, violence against any one member of a society diminishes us all. All victims of violent crime, whether surviving or deceased, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The people of Ontario should always remember the lives of those taken by violent crime. We should always reflect on the suffering and hardship that the survivors of violent crime and their families and friends of all victims of violent crime, whether or not the victim survived, endure with such courage.

Twenty years ago, there wasn't a place in our justice system for victims. Some even openly advocated the position that there shouldn't be a place for them. But over the

last 20 years we have seen a good number of Canadians stand up and demand to be heard and demand a place in our justice system. Many sought to directly influence the outcome of a case in which they had a personal interest. These actions led this Legislature to pass the Victims' Bill of Rights. It was an important step in our efforts to acknowledge and respond to the needs of victims of crime.

The Victims' Bill of Rights legislated a set of principles to support victims of crime with timely, respectful and courteous treatment throughout the criminal justice system. It also simplified the process for victims to sue their assailants in civil actions for damages and provided better support for children who must testify in court. We are all committed to creating a justice system that does not allow victims of crime to suffer twice, first at the hand of the criminal and, second under a justice system that does not respond and does not respect their needs.

A good number of victims have gone far beyond dealing with their own cases. A large number of them got involved in collective action to work to change our laws and the whole criminal justice system. I'd like to relate a very personal story of how I became involved with some of these remarkable people. More than 18 months ago, a drunk driver took the lives of two constituents of mine in Nepean, Linda LeBreton Holmes and her young son Brian. I was able to see at first hand how important the role of their family was in the justice system in this case.

While they made a tremendous contribution to their own case, ensuring that the perpetrator of that crime received one of the longest sentences imposed in the country, they also did something else. They got involved with others, particularly with Mothers Against Drunk Driving, with people like Colleen MacKenzie and Susan McNabb, and worked to change our laws. Their efforts paid off and played a tremendously important role in lobbying this government and this Legislature to eventually pass what is the toughest drunk driving law in North America. Simply put, decision-makers on all sides of the House could not look them in the eye and explain why we couldn't or why we shouldn't, and the remarkable thing was that this law was supported by members on all sides of the House.

I had a large town hall meeting on that issue in support of a private member's bill put forward by my colleague the member for Mississauga South. At that meeting I asked everyone in attendance, if they weren't from my riding, to call their member of provincial Parliament and indicate their support for tougher drunk driving laws and Mrs Marland's bill.

A few days later the member for Ottawa South, now the Leader of the Opposition, approached me and said he got a call from an Evalyn Collins, an Ottawa South resident who was at my town hall meeting, and she had asked him to support those efforts. That morning the member for Ottawa South told me, "John, I told your grandmother that I would support it." So these efforts don't have to be political and they can cross party lines.

A Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week would also serve to commemorate the contribution and the lost potential of those lives that were taken by violent crime. It would foster awareness of the suffering and hardship endured by the survivors of violent crime and their families and friends, an awareness of the courage with which they endure the suffering and hardship.

Most important though, it would encourage reflection on the treatment of victims in our justice system. It would make clear to governments, elected officials and police authorities the need for constant vigilance to ensure that victims of violent crime are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. It would invite accountability to the government of the day, regardless of its political stripe, to reflect on its own performance with respect to victims' issues and broader justice issues, and it would provide a forum for victims' groups and the general public to hold their government accountable for its own performance. Once a year it would provide the many diverse victims advocacy groups an opportunity to focus their energies on government and to come together to share their concerns and resources and to focus public attention on the importance of dealing with violence in our society.

A number of representatives from these groups are here today with us in the gallery: Sharon Rosenfeldt, one of the founders of Victims of Violence, and Debbie Mahaffy, director of Action for Victims, have made a remarkable contribution to our province and our country, not just for their advocacy of victims' rights but for their work in pushing for important changes in our justice system. I'm also pleased that Steve Sullivan, the executive director of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Violence, John Bates and a contingent from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and Paul Walters, the president of the Metro Toronto Police Association, could be with us today, because they have made a remarkable contribution to victims' issues throughout their organizations' long careers. Some of them have pushed for a special week of commemoration for quite some time.

Bill 155 proposes to designate the third week of April as Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week. This would coincide with the same practice in the United States, which has taken place for many years south of the border. It is hoped that Ontario could provide the national leadership to see such a week recognized across the country in provinces from British Columbia to Newfoundland and by the federal government and serve as an important symbolic move to push the federal government to bring in a national victims' bill of rights. It is our hope that the Attorney General could take that message to the federal-provincial justice conference taking place later this year. In fact, the federal government celebrates a week for prisoners, Restorative Justice Week. This event professes to include victims on one day of the week, but regrettably, few victims feel a part of it.

The third week of April is also a date with some meaning for two constituents of mine in Nepean. Sharon and Gary Rosenfeldt's son Daryn went missing during the third week of April 1991. Since that tragedy, Sharon and Gary have made a remarkable contribution to working with other victims and have been a strong and effective voice for reforming our justice system. Our country, our

province and my community of Nepean in recent years are so much richer for that contribution. Gary Rosenfeldt now serves as the executive director of Victims of Violence and the Canadian Centre for Missing Children. In a letter to MPPs, he writes:

"In 1983 a federal-provincial task force on justice for victims of crime concluded that victims of crime had been 'forgotten' in the justice system. Since then, some major improvements have been made, allowing crime victims more active participation in the system. As an organization dedicated to the improvement of the situation of crime victims, we are constantly faced with the difficult task of bringing attention to the needs of victims. A week once a year dedicated to victims would serve as a focal point for our efforts to educate the community, governments and the justice system on these needs. An increased awareness of victim needs will inevitably result in better services for crime victims in the province of Ontario."

As I said at the outset of my remarks, all of us deserve to live, work and raise our families in communities free from violence, but until that goal becomes a reality, I believe collectively we all have a responsibility, because an act of violence against one member of our society indeed diminishes the safety and security of us all. This bill would not only commemorate the victims of violent crime; it would also serve as a vehicle to hold the government of the day accountable for how it deals with victims — that is an accountability which I believe the government would welcome — and cause the government to reflect on its performance in the area of criminal justice. I believe there's is a tremendously important symbolic message in the bill that I'm presenting this morning, and I respectfully ask for the support of my colleagues on all sides of the House. Thank you.

1110

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): We will of course all be supporting this bill and respect its intent, but I do want to say in the very few moments that each of us will have to speak to this bill that I for one will be very concerned if all we do is, and I quote the bill, reflect "on treatment of victims in our judicial system." I'll be very concerned if our reflection does not lead to action.

I'll be further concerned if we continue to be more concerned with simply commemorating victims, as important as that is, and less concerned with doing everything we possibly can to ensure that there are fewer victims. In this regard, I believe there is much more that we have to do.

I refer back to a study that was released in the spring of this year, and I want, because we have such a few minutes, to address my comments specifically to my concern about the continued victimization of women in their homes. The study that was released last spring deals specifically with women who continue to be murdered by their partners. The study indicates that greater awareness of violence against women and harsher penalties from the justice system have not reduced the risk of death at the hands of husbands and boyfriends for Ontario women. At least 159 women were shot, stabbed, bludgeoned or choked to death by current or former partners in the four years from 1991 to 1994; an average of 40 a year, compared with 32 a year from 1974 to 1990.

It was just this week that I had a phone call from a women who lives in southern Ontario whose husband is currently in jail for having abused her in very violent ways. He was in jail because he was not able to make his initial bail payments but he is now coming up for bail review and the information this woman has is that he has the resources now to be able to meet the bail. She is obviously fearful that when he is released from jail on bail, her life is going to be at risk.

She has made contact with every available resource in her community. She has been told basically that her only option is to keep a suitcase packed for herself and for her children so that when her husband is released she can flee. I don't know what to tell this woman, other than to say that this Legislature must be absolutely committed to doing more to ensure that women and children can be safe in their homes.

When this report was released last spring detailing how many women continue to be killed by intimate partners, the fact that 70% of all female homicide victims are killed by intimate partners, they said that the 1992 recommendations of a previous report on how to prevent such killings had not yet been acted on. They said we need to give police more tools to prevent men from harassing their partners immediately after separation; we need to keep better records on men with a history of violence against women. I believe we must have much stronger bail provisions for any who have broken peace bonds or restraining orders.

I believe too that we have to take steps beyond that to make sure women have the ability to leave abusive situations and to find a safe and supportive haven and, to go beyond that, to have an opportunity to establish independent, secure lives for themselves and their children.

It is important that we commemorate victims. It is important, as the member for Nepean has said, that we ensure that our justice system provides every possible support for victims and for their families. I believe some steps have been taken in that regard with the establishment of the domestic violence courts, but I believe we must take further steps to prevent victimization and to stop the violence.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I just want to say at the outset that of course I'll be supporting this bill. It almost goes without saying. If one just has a look at the preamble for the bill, it says, "The people of Ontario desire to live, work and raise their families in communities free from violent crime." It would be hard for me to imagine anyone in Ontario who wouldn't agree and support a statement like that.

It goes on to say as well that "all victims of violent crime...deserve to be treated with dignity and respect." Once again, that's something that's very difficult for any of us to disagree with. It also goes on to say that it would make clear to governments and elected officials the need for "constant vigilance to ensure that victims of violent crime are treated with dignity and respect." I'm wondering

whether the member for Nepean is suggesting that we need a week to commemorate the victims of violent crime so that his own government will pay attention to their plight and take action for them.

This bill, I'm concerned, is really almost trivializing the pain that's suffered by victims of violent crime by dedicating only one week to their suffering. This is something that needs to be paid attention to 52 weeks of the year. Anyone who has come in contact with victims of violent crime — and I can tell you that I have on numerous occasions, as a former assistant crown attorney, dealt with victims of crime, in my private practice as a lawyer and working in the criminal courts as well — knows the suffering they go through. Anyone who has had a family member who is a victim of violent crime knows the suffering they have to endure.

Victims of violent crime don't need just a week to commemorate the suffering they are experiencing as a result of criminal activity. What victims need are things like psychological counselling, and we've seen cuts in health care and in psychological counselling availability since this government was elected in 1995. We need increases in those types of services.

We know that victims of violent crime are very often spouses, oftentimes women, oftentimes children, who find that trying to obtain residential treatment after they become victims of violent crime is becoming increasingly difficult. We've seen diminished resources for residential programs as well for women who are victims of violent crime. In my own community we have a very well-respected residential home for women. It's called Hiatus House. That was an institution that had been established by volunteers several years ago and has been finding that it has become increasingly more reliant on volunteer and fund-raising activities as the support from the government is decreasing.

We also need to see simpler ways to ensure that victims of violent crime are able to obtain restitution. The member for Nepean mentioned some of the steps that have been taken with respect to legislation to ensure that easier civil actions are able to be brought to try and recover restitution for victims of crime. However, we know that oftentimes people who are involved in criminal activity don't have the resources to make restitution or satisfy civil judgements, and that's something we really need to address our minds to as well.

Of course, we need further resources. That was a similar suggestion that was made with respect to the previous bill about penalties for persons who are in involved in impaired boating. We need to take steps to try and prevent violent crime and not have to deal so often with victims of violent crime, but try to prevent those crimes from happening in the first place. Police are under continuous pressure to try to do more with fewer resources. If police were receiving further support or more resources to try to prevent the incidence of violent crime, that would go a long way to prevention.

Crown attorneys are under increasing pressure as well to try to deal expeditiously with full dockets of criminal cases in our criminal courts and are under pressure to try to resolve cases by plea bargaining. Oftentimes it's difficult to try to obtain remedies or penalties that are in the best interests of victims of violent crime as a result of trying to plea-bargain because the court space just isn't available to prosecute as many cases as the police are laying charges. So further resources for crown attorneys are needed as well.

Of course, if there's an increase in the number of investigations and charges that are laid by the police, further courtroom space is required as well. In Windsor, we've been working on a court building replacement in our city. That's a project that's been going on for a number of years. I would urge this government — I see the Attorney General here — to take steps to try and expedite the construction of that new court building as quickly as possible so that cases are heard on a speedier basis and the victims of crime don't go through the suffering that comes from the fact that cases take so long to get through the court system. I would ask him to try and speed up that project.

To summarize, I just want to reiterate that I will be supporting this bill. I would hope that all of us consider the interests of the victims of crime not just one week per year, but every week per year.

1120

Mr Jim Flaherty (Durham Centre): I rise today on behalf of the government to speak in support of the member for Nepean's private member's bill, Bill 155, the Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week Act.

Bill 155, which was authored by my colleague John Baird, proposes making the third week of April an annual week of commemoration for victims of violent crime. This annual commemoration will foster awareness among all people in Ontario of the suffering, hardship and, above all, the great courage exhibited by victims of violent crime, their families and their friends. Just as importantly, this week will also highlight the great potential that is forfeited every time a life is lost to the actions of a violent criminal.

Mr Baird tells me that should Bill 155, and similar bills which may be introduced in the legislatures of other provinces and territories, be passed, this would provide most of North America with a concurrent week of commemoration for the victims of violent crime. I support such an initiative. Our government is wholeheartedly committed to correcting a grievous imbalance that has developed in our justice system where the rights of the accused take centre stage and the needs of victims are pushed off to the wings. We refuse to tolerate a system that allows victims of crime to be victimized twice: first at the hands of the criminal and then again at the hands of a legal system that does not respect, understand or respond to the needs of victims.

In our government's first year, we took immediate steps to introduce a Victim's Bill of Rights, which was proclaimed into law on June 11 one year ago. This legislation, among the most comprehensive in Canada, brings about long-overdue changes to the way victims of crime are treated by the justice system.

I listened a moment ago with interest to the comments by the NDP member for Windsor-Riverside about restitution being appropriate in the matter of victims' rights. I invite the member to read the Victim's Bill of Rights that became law a year ago in Ontario, which sets out not only restitution rights but a simplified method of accomplishing restitution for victims of crime in the province.

With respect to the courthouse in Windsor, I might also add that our government is providing five more courtrooms in that courthouse than the original plans even called for and that the building is being built as quickly as it can be built. The city of Windsor is well advantaged in that regard, since there are many areas in the province that are looking for new courthouses and don't have a courthouse under construction. The city of Windsor does, as a result of the efforts of our government and our Attorney General.

Among its various provisions, the bill of rights enshrines the victim's justice fund to ensure that money collected from fines imposed on offenders will be used strictly for services to victims. During the first two years of its term, our government allocated more than $10.2 million from the fund to improve and expand services to victims across Ontario. We will continue to invest additional funds for victims' services in the future. We have dedicated funds to double the number of victim/witness assistance programs available to assist victims of crime as their cases proceed through the courts and to enhance the services provided in existing sites.

Victims in 26 communities will soon have the support of their own local program. These programs help people through the court process so they won't be traumatized again. In 1996-97, approximately 20,000 victims of crime were served by this program. These programs focus on the most vulnerable. More than 80% of the people receiving this support are victims of spousal assault, sexual assault or child abuse, while families of homicide victims and families of people killed by impaired drivers make up the remainder of those who are helped by this program.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services will also be expanding its programs which provide immediate, onsite services to victims of crime. We will be adding eight new victim crisis assistance and referral service centres across Ontario, bringing the total number of sites to 20. This includes the addition of eight new sites across Ontario. This further guarantees that services will be available when needed to victims in their local communities.

Our government established domestic violence court projects at Toronto's old city hall and in North York. Launched in cooperation with judges, police, crown attorneys and the victim/witness assistance program, these new court projects are designed to do a better job of both supporting victims and holding abusers accountable for their crimes.

We are looking for solutions to the problem of domestic violence by trying different approaches. In North York, the focus is on breaking the cycle of violence. In assault cases that do not involve serious injury or use of a weapon, first-time offenders undergo intensive batterer's counselling. The downtown Toronto court at old city hall focuses on prosecution, employing improved investigation techniques such as the use of 911 tapes to obtain better evidence and improve the chances of obtaining a conviction.

Both projects are supported by increased victims' services and are gaining recognition as creative responses to the crime of domestic assault. In July, the government announced that these innovative projects were being expanded to six new locations across Ontario. Victims of domestic abuse in Ottawa, London, Hamilton, North York, the regional municipality of Durham at Oshawa, and Brampton will soon have access to these creative new approaches to dealing with the difficult and long-standing problem of domestic violence.

I would be remiss at this point not to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the Honourable Dianne Cunningham, the member for London North and the minister responsible for women's issues, who this summer announced the spending of an additional $27 million to deal specifically with violence prevention issues. She has shown incredible leadership in coordinating nine ministries in their plans to reduce violence against women in Ontario.

This government will not stop here. We will continue to expand victims' services, to seek policy solutions and to make the real changes necessary to ensure the rights of victims are protected in Ontario's justice system. An annual week of commemoration for victims of violent crime represents another step on the journey towards an Ontario in which the needs of all crime victims are considered. I ask all members of the House to join me in supporting Bill 155 and reaffirming the commitment of this government to rebalancing the scales of justice by offering victims of crime the respect they so richly deserve.

Our government has done more to assist victims of crime than any other government. For those who may not agree, including perhaps some members opposite, I invite them to speak to those present in the galleries today who have experienced loss as victims of crime.

May I commend the member for Nepean for bringing forward this important piece of legislation to be debated in this House. I urge all members to support it.

1130

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): I rise to speak on Bill 155, the Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Act, which, as members have said, is an act which seeks to designate the third week in April as Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week.

In reading the documentation provided by the honourable member opposite who's sponsoring the bill, I note that the purpose of the bill — he says in the backgrounder, "Victims of violence are represented by a wide range of diverse advocacy groups." I want to spend just a little moment acknowledging the hard work of those groups. In my own experience as a civil servant back at the Department of National Health and Welfare, I've seen the efforts

of these groups and I want to commend them for their efforts and their successes to date.

To quote again from the backgrounder: "A commemorative week would provide an opportunity for these individuals to focus their attention and resources in an effort to educate the public, elected officials and police on the issues facing victims and their treatment within our justice system. During the commemorative week, the government of the day will be forced to assess its performance with respect to the needs and rights of victims. In addition, the week provides a forum within which the public can hold its government accountable on its treatment and response to victims."

This is further accentuated by some of the letters we have received from some of the groups. Victims of Violence has written to speak about the need for a Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week, not only to recognize the pain and anguish suffered by those who have fallen victim to senseless acts of violence, but also to educate the public and government officials about the physical, emotional and financial hardships many victims are forced to endure as a result of crimes committed against them.

In another letter of endorsement from the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime: "It not only provides us with an opportunity to remember victims of crime and hardships they endure, but it will also be an opportunity to educate the public about what the impact of crime can be on people and what they face in the criminal justice system."

While we debate this bill, I think it would be perfectly appropriate to review what the government has done to help victims of violent crime, particularly steps to ensure that there are no victims of violent crime, because surely that is our ultimate goal. As the honourable member opposite said so well, we all ought to have the right to live, work and raise our families in communities free from violent crime.

We then turn to the government's performance here. I of course have to turn to the document that became famous two years ago, the Common Sense Revolution. In this document we find the wording under "Law Enforcement": "The people of Ontario are rightly concerned about community safety in our province, particularly the increasing incidence of violent crime. That is why funding for law enforcement and justice will be guaranteed."

Unfortunately, the rhetoric in the Common Sense Revolution falls a bit short of reality. In my own community of Ottawa-Carleton, we are faced with cuts in the government's grants to support policing in our community. With a budget of some $99 million in the region of Ottawa-Carleton, when the provincial grant falls from $7.8 million in 1995 to zero in 1998 — we find the community struggling to deal with the incidence of violent crime, and losing resources in our effort to deal with this important social problem does not help. It certainly doesn't help the victims of violent crime. It does not help the honourable member's laudable goal of ensuring that we can live, work and raise our families in communities free from violent crime.

Yesterday a colleague of mine raised in the House the cuts the government has made to community policing and prevention, some $3 million. Again, the intent falls far short of reality within our own communities here in Ontario.

We also have to look towards what the government has done to support communities in their effort to reduce crime, setting aside issues of law enforcement. I can only draw on my own experience with the children's aid society in Ottawa-Carleton, which found itself losing government funding at the very time when stress was being placed on families — domestic violence being an important contributor to violent crime — to the point where the children's aid society had to bring in Harris days. They literally closed down the operation of the children's aid society, except for emergency intake, to respond to the government cuts.

What does this mean? This means that families who require counselling, who need help to go over some of the crises they are facing, particularly the 21.6% cut in welfare rates, were without that 12 times within the year. They were called "Harris days," unfortunately.

All I can say is that it is important that we have an evenhanded approach. While it is important to support this bill — and no one can deny the symbolic importance — it is also necessary to ensure that there is sufficient concrete action to reduce the incidence of violent crime. That ultimately is our goal, to reduce the incidence of violent crime. It is the government's responsibility to ensure there are sufficient resources to do that. I call upon the government to follow through on the intent of this bill by ensuring that there are sufficient resources.

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): I suppose — no, I'm simply not going to. There are going to be plenty of opportunities for me to criticize this or any other government for what it has or hasn't done. I find some of the comments, particularly those of the member for Durham Centre, regrettable in that they were part of a discussion and debate around this particular bill, which I indicate, as has my colleague from Windsor-Riverside, complete support for.

I come from a part of the province which understands all too painfully that victims of violent crime are victims, and yes, the families, the survivors, but communities also are scarred and mutilated as a result of the wanton violence, the simply unspeakable violence that has been imposed and that we run the risk of having imposed in our communities or upon any of us at any time.

I want to speak very specifically about violence and how we have to develop a zero tolerance. We know all too well that far too many victims of violence are children; they're our nieces and nephews or our neighbours' kids. We know the tragedy of a parent burying a child, the abnormality of it. It's simply not natural, and it's surely not the way God designed the human order that parents should have to bury children. We also know that violence against children begets violence against children, as we

begin to understand how that nurtures among those victims a propensity to be violent in their own right as adults towards their own children or perhaps towards the children of others.

I'm confident the bill is going to pass. One of the ways by which we have to give effect to the bill is to enunciate very clearly zero tolerance towards violence. We have to express a repugnance for violence towards others. We've gone through a process over the last generation or two where there's been increased intolerance towards violence that in the course of even some our lifetimes was disregarded or turned away from.

We have to express as a provincial community, as families within our cities and regions, this total repugnance for acts of violence. We've got to talk about guarding ourselves and our children from it, but also guarding those whose lives are so beleaguered, so distorted, so maligned, hoping that we can detect as youngsters those people who otherwise would become the perpetrators of violence, detect them and prevent yet more of the crimes we've been witnesses to and all of us victims of, it seems far too often during the course of our lifetime.

1140

I support the bill. I applaud the comments of the member for Windsor-Riverside. I don't think anybody has any dispute about the fact, although one can select a particular time frame in which our minds address the issue of violent crime, that it's something we should be conscious of and concerned about on a daily basis.

I do want to recognize that one of our institutional safeguards is the police in our communities. I suppose anybody who's pulled over for a speeding ticket or a seatbelt ticket finds themselves hard done by by the cop who did it, singled out unfairly. Yet at those points in our lives when we become victims or when our neighbours become victims or our family become victims, we want the biggest, toughest cops in the world to arrive as promptly as possible on the scene — we do — and as many as possible, and we want them to do everything that the law would enable them to do to either interrupt the attack or catch the perpetrators and make sure that perpetrators are dealt with in our courts and that the community is protected.

Once again, we support it. Once again, with no great pride — I don't take any pride in coming from a part of the country, a part of the province, that has collectively suffered, as have other regions — we're not unique — but the impact of incredible, inhuman and unspeakable violence against members of our own community.

I say that this impacts and, as I've indicated before, leaves an indelible mark on that community, one that I'm not sure can be erased or relieved promptly. Quite frankly, in the Niagara region it is going to be a considerable period of time, perhaps generations, before the impact of violence in our community and the memory of it and the effect of it has been appropriately erased.

I hope that during weeks of commemoration there's also reflection on the need to act in very practical and meaningful ways, a need to ensure that victims of crime and their families and the survivors of victims of crime have access to growing resources, have access to compensation, as has been said. I understand that with the civil procedures that were simplified in the Victims' Bill of Rights, the sad reality is most criminals can't be called upon to compensate their victims. That means that we, collectively, as a community have to be prepared to compensate victims, monetarily and in every other possible way.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): I'm pleased to be able to rise today and express my views in support of Bill 155 and in support of the member for Nepean, who is another very bright light in our government.

In most crimes there is at least one victim. In most crimes the entire family is affected, and the family victims are too often the ones who are left drowning in the wake of the rush that we as a society have created in trying to provide assistance to the criminals or to guarantee rights to the criminals, criminals whose crimes have often destroyed the lives of the victims and their families.

Our courts often hear sob story after sob story, rationalization after rationalization, about how violent criminals are not responsible for their actions. It's always somebody else. Somebody else is to blame, whether it's their parents or their teachers or their doctors or their chiropractors or their psychiatrists or the devil, and the bleeding hearts in our society buy this nonsense.

In their desperate rush to defend their criminal defendants, defence lawyers often attempt to convince us that the violent criminal isn't really a violent criminal; they're misunderstood victims. How often do we read in the media of an event, and of course we can quickly forget that event. The media, in their attempt to increase sales or to increase hype, whatever, highlight every minuscule detail of a crime. Again, the families have to go through this over and over again.

I say this because a number of years ago a friend of mine committed suicide. I tortured myself for about two or three years after that, thinking, "What could I have done to prevent that suicide?" I was one of the last people to whom he talked. I realized after a number of years that I couldn't have done anything. These families also go through that. They say, "What could we have done?" and of course they are tortured day after day through the media.

We can't do anything about the media, but we can heighten public awareness. We do have the ability to heighten public awareness, and Bill 155 is a step in that direction. Establishing a week of recognition would be perhaps one of a series of initiatives that we could enact which would heighten public awareness.

One of the things I would like to see is a school curriculum to target some of the root causes of crime, to help young people understand that committing a crime against someone else also scars them, because it reflects on who they are and who they will become as a member of society. We could establish a specific goal in our educational system to help youth understand themselves, understand the type of person they want to become. An important

component in that strategy would be to help youth establish for themselves the type of person they do not want to become.

In the primary grades, we could give consideration to children learning about themselves in relation to violence, ie: "What is a good person? What type of a person do I want to become? What are the important similarities between people, what are the important differences between people, and how do our differences benefit each one of us? Why is a violent person violent?" What image do we want to implant in the minds of our youth about violent people? This is all part and parcel of having a week to commemorate the families and the victims of violent crime. It's an educational process.

At the secondary school level we could reinforce what they have learned at the primary school level. "What should I do when I become angry?" That is something we could have at both the primary school and the secondary school levels. "Is there a way that a violent person can be taught to overcome being violent? Why are people violent towards others?" Let's do some analysis on this in the school system part of this week. "What do I think about being violent? How do people overcome being violent?" Students could do essays on this, five- or 10-page essays, in high school. Of course, they can always be taught how to think about how they want other people to treat them.

I want to thank my colleague Mr Baird, the member for Nepean, for his efforts in bringing forth this bill. I believe it's a very positive initiative and I will support it.

1150

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I'm proud and happy to be able to rise and speak to the bill presented by the member for Nepean. Let me say from the very outset that I will certainly be endorsing and supporting this bill because I think it fills the purposes for which it was introduced, and I think they're important purposes.

Let me, though, just outline a little more what I believe a bill such as this should also incorporate. There should be a celebration within the bill, a celebration of the lives of the people who have been taken away from us. Let me relate the Sudbury experience to the members in the House and to the families who are in the gallery today.

In October 1993, a very, very good police officer by the name of Constable Joe MacDonald was gunned down tragically by two hooligans. Joe devoted his life to youth in the Sudbury area. He was a coach at Lasalle and later of the New Sudbury Wildcats. He loved football and he loved children.

Sudbury wanted to know what it could do to celebrate Joe, to remember Joe but to celebrate Joe. Sid Forrester, the long-time coach of the Sudbury Spartans, thought we should start a football league called the Joe MacDonald Youth Football League. A group of football enthusiasts and coaches — Frank Pagnucco, Mike Staffen, Al Lekun, Mike Fabilli, Marty Rupnick, John Larsen and my brother, Chris Bartolucci — came together and worked very closely with the then deputy chief of the regional municipality of Sudbury police force, Dennis O'Neil, worked well with city council, and we ended up with this wonderful league that now has two divisions, for children aged 10 to 15. Every Labour Day we kick off the Joe MacDonald Youth Football League. We celebrate Joe MacDonald, his life and his contribution from Labour Day until the first week in November when we hold the championship game.

Part of the coaching is to remind the kids who are playing football what Joe MacDonald was all about and why this youth football league was created. Indeed, we don't only commemorate but we celebrate his life. I would suggest to you that 145 kids remembering why they're playing football every Saturday and Sunday, remembering why their parents come out with them, remembering why the camaraderie is found at Lily Creek in the football games is education in itself to remember that the families of victims of violence deserve some form of recognition.

I commemorate with the MacDonald family, with Nancy MacDonald. I remember being a former police commissioner and hiring these young, wonderful people to enforce the law. It is important that this bill passes. It is important that we remember that these victims of violence possess the opportunities for profound, positive influences on the people they impacted upon.

Indeed it's important that we remember the families. It's important that we remember the Rosenfelds, the Mahaffys, all the family members in the gallery today and all those family members who are victims of violence. If that happens, then some day as we continue to strive for what we believe to be a better society, that will come about.

This type of bill is not paying lip-service to it. The member for Nepean and I don't always agree, but on this one we agree. If this week has even a fraction of the impact that the Joe MacDonald Youth Football League has on the community of Sudbury, this bill is very worthwhile, this bill is very necessary and in fact this bill will help in the healing or grieving the families go through. The grieving doesn't stop a week, a year or two years after the violent crime. The grieving continues. As long as these family members realize that we remember with them and we celebrate the lives that were taken from us, then, ladies and gentlemen who are gathered here this morning, this bill will accomplish the goals that the member for Nepean has set out in presenting Bill 155.

The Acting Speaker: The government has but nine seconds left, so I'm assuming we'll move to the member for Nepean and his reply.

Mr Baird: I want to thank the other members of the House who took the opportunity to speak today and particularly thank for their thoughtful remarks the member for Fort William, who mentioned the importance of anti-violence measures with respect to domestic violence; the member for Durham Centre, who spoke on the bill; the member for Welland-Thorold, who spoke about a zero tolerance for violence, and I certainly share his views in that regard; and particularly the member for Sudbury. I can think of few tragedies which match the tragedy of a community losing a police officer, someone there to protect the community. We all owe a special debt of gratitude

to those victims of violence who serve in the community to protect us all.

I have a quote from a prepared text, some remarks from Debbie Mahaffy this morning which I might add to the record: "A week designated Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week will create an opportunity for specific sharing of information and techniques in assisting victims of crime. There is no one better qualified to teach professionals, citizens of the community than victims themselves. Elevating the status of victims in the community, in the media and the justice system to a level of equal importance to that of the offender would guarantee that the system itself would be held more accountable to those most affected by crime." That accountability is one that is welcomed by this government.

One of the members opposite mentioned that perhaps a week was insufficient and that we need a week to get the attention of the government. I would simply indicate that we've been privileged to have with us this morning — normally the cabinet don't show up for private members' hour as a symbol that this is a genuine private members' hour — the Attorney General, who has been here for the complete hour. I do note and appreciate his attendance this morning. It is our hope that this will be the beginning of a campaign to launch a national victims' bill of rights, a national week of commemoration. I'm pleased that the Attorney General will take that message.

We can go back and forth and talk about what we're doing, but the reality is, we can all do more.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (LICENCE SUSPENSIONS), 1997

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): I want to thank the members for their cooperation in consideration of having a neophyte in the chair this morning.

Mr Grimmett moved second reading of Bill 154, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to the suspension of drivers' licences.

All those in favour of the motion, say "aye."

All opposed, say "nay."

I declare the motion carried.

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): I'd ask that this bill be referred to the standing committee on resources development.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME COMMEMORATION WEEK ACT, 1997

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Baird moved second reading of Bill 155, An Act proclaiming Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week.

All those in favour, say "aye."

Opposed?

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the administration of justice.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour? It shall be done.

It being near 12 of the clock and private members' business being finished, this House is adjourned until 1:30.

The House recessed from 1159 to 1331.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TVONTARIO

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I want to use this opportunity to invite all members of the Legislature to TVOntario's sixth annual open house this Saturday, September 20, an event that will allow them to understand just how important TVO is to the people of Ontario.

This is truly a fun event, but it must be said that this year's open house is also being held under a bit of a shadow, the shadow being the government's decision to put TVO under review by the Office of Privatization.

We acknowledge that the government, with its majority, can force this review process to take place. The Ontario Liberal caucus, though, believes that review is wrong and that TVO should remain publicly owned and operated.

But what bothers us, what truly concerns us now, is that Privatization Minister Sampson and Culture Minister Mushinski promised full public consultation before any decision would be made. Yet here we are three months into the process, there has been no consultation done, and as far as we can tell, no consultation is planned.

TVOntario belongs to the people of Ontario and they have a right to a say in its future. The people won't be shut out of the process. A massive petition campaign is now under way, and last week the Wawatay radio network, which uses TVO's signal to provide native-language radio service across northern Ontario, went silent for two days in a moving display of support to draw attention to the concerns about possible privatization.

Minister, the public must have a say. Let the people of Sioux Lookout, Kenora, Fort Frances, Thunder Bay, Geraldton, Sudbury, Schreiber, Terrace Bay, London, Ottawa, Windsor and Toronto tell the people how they feel.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Speaker, you're going to be as pleased as I am to learn that Welland city council has passed a resolution opposing this government's Bill 136. Welland city council understands that Bill 136 is a direct attack on collective bargaining and the rights of workers across this province, including

workers in the community of Welland and across regional Niagara.

Public sector workers and their friends in the private sector understand full well that this government's real agenda is to attack collective bargaining, in fact to destroy collective bargaining here in the province of Ontario, to set workers back 40 and 50 years, to lower wages, and in the course of all that to create yet more unemployment while picking the pockets of the sick, the elderly, youth, students, low-income workers and workers across the board, paying for a phoney tax break, two thirds of which is going to the top 10% of income earners.

As I join CUPE members this evening in previously unheard-of numbers, we'll discover how angry and how resolved these workers are to resist this government, to oppose this government and to send this government into the exile it deserves. People across Niagara, across this province, are not going to tolerate the viciousness of this government's attacks on working people.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Mrs Lillian Ross (Hamilton West): I am proud to be able to rise to salute the hundreds of veterans in my community as they join in marking Legion Week next week, September 21 to 27.

The Royal Canadian Legion holds a prominent and special place in the hearts of Canadians, particularly for those whose families have been called on to make personal sacrifices for our country and for our freedom. Yet the work of the members of local Legions has gone far beyond the defence of our country in times of conflict. Over its 72-year history, the Legion has served hundreds of thousands of Canadians through its veterans' and community services. Its ongoing efforts in educating young people about the history of the Legion and its contribution to making Canada what it is today make all of us proud and help in a most meaningful way to pave the road for the Legion's future service.

Throughout its history the Legion has had to cope with changes in its membership, as well as in society at large. The Legion has been breaking new ground in its membership among the children and grandchildren of Canadian veterans.

The record of the Royal Canadian Legion speaks for itself. I know all members of this House join me in wishing all members of the Legion the very best as they mark this Legion Week and set their course of service for the future. They have earned our respect and our sincere thanks.

COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): Grave concerns are being raised in Ottawa-Carleton concerning the ability of the government to honour its commitment that community health services are in place prior to hospital closures. The hospital restructuring commission, in issuing its August 13 report on hospital closures for Ottawa-Carleton, stated explicitly, "Reinvestment in alternative community-based services such as home care and long-term care is essential before hospital restructuring can occur."

It is apparent that the restructuring commission can close hospitals. It is up to the government to make the necessary reinvestments. To date, not all of the $100 million in savings from closing the Grace, Riverside and Elisabeth Bruyère Health Centre have been reinvested in health care in Ottawa-Carleton. Now the Ottawa-Carleton district health council is fearful that what is being reinvested will be too little and too late. For example, the Grace hospital is to stop admitting patients on May 15, 1998, Riverside on May 31, 1998, and the Montfort emergency is to close by March 1998.

The concern expressed by the Ottawa-Carleton district health council, which I share, is that the closure of these services and others will be implemented before the necessary renovations at the General and Queensway-Carleton hospitals are completed, renovations necessary to offset the impact of the planned closures. Further, the reinvestment the government is proposing to make, according to the Ottawa-Carleton district health council, falls far short of providing what the current hospital system now provides.

I would therefore urge the government to rethink its unrealistic time lines and inadequate investment in order to ensure that people's health in Ottawa-Carleton is not endangered during this difficult time of transition.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): We're at a very grave moment in the history of Ontario. We have seen for the first time a government that is prepared to provoke public sector workers to the brink of illegal strikes, chaos in our province, services that people won't be able to access, and a government that made a commitment to this Legislature, to the people of the province, to those public sector workers that they would have democratic input into this legislation that will affect their very lives. In fact, the minister stood in this House and said, "We will have public hearings and we will travel this province." As you know, the minister has completely gone back on her word, the word she provided to this House.

I can't tell you how saddened and angered I am to see a government that would force people to the brink of such precipitous action, people who just want to do their job, provide for their families, who want to provide services. It's a very grave day and it's hard to find anything of humour, but there are some resourceful people out there who can bring humour even to these very difficult situations.

As you know, on September 26 and 27 in North Bay the Days of Action will be taking place, in the Premier's home riding. I want you to know that there's an entrepreneur, a deli up there, Today's Lunch Co of Phil White, who's got a new addition to the menu. It is the Sink Harris Sub. We'll all be there to eat it in North Bay.

1340

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I rise to address the House today regarding Durham region's fifth annual Take Back the Night walk. Take Back the Night was initiated in 1978 in San Francisco when some 5,000 participants from across the United States marched in San Francisco's pornography district. Since then, Take Back the Night has grown into an annual event in many communities across Ontario and North America.

Take Back the Night is an opportunity to educate people and to raise awareness of the issues around violence in our communities. Tonight the Durham region's Take Back the Night walk, organized by the Oshawa-Durham Rape Crisis Centre, will take place in Oshawa beginning at 5:30 at Oshawa city hall and the walk starting at 7 pm. Following the walk, guest speakers, one a young girl, will speak on the impact of violence in their lives.

Take Back the Night is a statement of the commitment towards ending violence against women and children. The recent announcements of a domestic violence court and a victims' crisis assistance referral service being located in Oshawa and other locations in Ontario should assist in the challenge towards ending these crimes, along with my colleague Mr Baird's Bill 155, passing second reading today, the Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week Act.

But we must do more. We must all seek new ways to end violent crime and to support those who have been victimized by crime. I urge all Ontarians to hear the message against violence that Take Back the Night sends out and to apply that message not to just one night but to every night.

MEDIA REPORTING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Not satisfied with the reduction by the media giants in the number of reporters and columnists covering events and issues at Queen's Park and the results of millions of dollars of self-serving, blatantly partisan advertising by the Conservative government, paid for by the taxpayers of this province, the Mike Harris government has reached for a weapon in its arsenal that it has employed with some success in other situations and with other people and organizations — the act of intimidation.

Members of the news media who dare to present an issue in anything other than glowing terms for the Harris crowd are chastised, criticized or called to account by the taxpayer-paid flacks for the ministers in the right-wing regime of Mike of North Bay.

Such bullying intimidation tactics may work with some health councils, hospitals, boards of education, municipalities or other agencies that rely upon the Mike Harris government for funding and favours, but flacks be warned: It's unlikely to work on the Queen's Park press gallery, who pride themselves on their independence, their objectivity, their persistence and their sense of fair play.

Control of the media and the message may be the goal of the backroom boys in the Harris regime, but no matter how big the bat they wield, they are likely to strike out. You see, you simply cannot intimidate the news media at the Ontario Legislature with whining or whimpering. As the old saying goes in the hallowed halls of the main Legislative Building, "Don't poke the badger."

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): On August 16, 1996, a cataclysmic event occurred in the province. It was an event that some people did not hear about, that some people were excited about, that some people were angry about and, unbelievable as it may seem, that some people ignored.

It is not often that we can be precise about what constitutes a defining moment in the history of a province, but I believe that August 16, 1996, was such a moment. Bay Street was ecstatic, Main Street was apprehensive and Wall Street was orgasmic. Finally the Ontario Tories were going to deliver to their friends exactly what their friends wanted.

That defining moment, as I say, was August 16, 1996. But wait a minute. That was over a year ago. How is it that a defining moment that occurred so long ago is still not appreciated by all those Tory supporters out there? Believe me, those sycophants are getting restless. "Where's the meat?" they're asking. If the big event occurred on August 16, 1996, how is it that nothing tangible has resulted from that cataclysmic event? Am I wrong? Was August 16, 1996, not a defining moment in Ontario?

Well, it is time to end the suspense. It's time to remind all the Tory members exactly what happened on that magic day. That was the day Rob Sampson, MPP for Mississauga West, was appointed by Premier Harris as the minister responsible for privatization. While I don't support privatization, I do have to ask you, what does Mr Sampson do for his extravagant salary?

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): York County Hospital joins an impressive list of hospitals in Ontario that now offer magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, services.

MRI is a non-invasive diagnostic technology that provides cross-sectional or three-dimensional images of structures and organs within the body. It provides scans of the head, central nervous system and spine, as well as detailed images of the heart, major blood vessels, blood flow, joints and soft tissues. MRIs can detect brain and spinal diseases, several forms of cancer, musculoskeletal disorders and several cardiovascular conditions.

Canada's first three MRI machines were installed in late 1982 and 1983 at St Joseph's Health Centre in London, University of British Columbia Hospital and Princess

Margaret Hospital in Toronto. In the past, only teaching hospitals could operate MRIs, but several years ago the Ministry of Health changed its policy to allow hospitals to apply for the MRI diagnostic service.

The best way to keep Ontarians healthy is to detect signs of illness early, to act quickly and to prevent problems before they arise. Expansion of MRI services by Ontario's Ministry of Health will ensure residents will not have to endure a long wait to receive vital diagnostic services.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I beg leave to inform the House that yesterday the Clerk received the 44th report of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 105(g)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Simcoe Centre): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 150, An Act proclaiming United Empire Loyalists' Day.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I rise today to respond to some of the rhetoric I've heard in the past 24 hours from the union bosses.

In this morning's paper Gord Wilson, the president of the OFL, is quoted as saying, "We consider it a war room exercise." Earl Manners, the head of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation said, "There is a mood in the room that extraordinary actions are going to become necessary." Sid Ryan said, "We have moved people to a war footing and issued a red alert."

This is very strong rhetoric and not, in my opinion, constructive or productive. While I do not agree with these tactics, I understand that Mr Manners and Mr Ryan must get elected and that they believe they must engage in this type of rhetoric to appeal to their constituency. But I'd like to remind this House, and through this House, the taxpayers of this province of some facts. After 10 years of high-taxing and big-spending governments, Ontarians called for change: lower taxes, less government, quality services. They called for change because high taxes, big deficits and big government were not giving them quality services.

To achieve these goals, our government and the broader public sector must engage in new thinking and new approaches to quality service delivery. In the spring of this year, prior to the introduction of Bill 136, we heard from the union movement that they would strongly oppose any legislation that removed successor rights or overrode freely bargained contracting-out restrictions. Despite the specific request for these provisions from the municipal and hospital employer groups, we listened to the workers and agreed to the union request.

After the introduction of the bill by the Minister of Labour, the union bosses insisted on a meeting with the government to discuss further changes beyond the concessions we already gave on successor rights in particular. Minister Witmer offered repeatedly to meet with Gord Wilson, but he refused. In a meeting between Minister Witmer and myself and several union leaders on September 2, we undertook to engage in serious discussions about further amendments to our labour proposal.

On the education front, prior to the introduction of legislation, the Minister of Education's staff engaged in extensive, around-the-clock discussions. Officials in my office also indicated a willingness to talk with representatives from various teachers' federations. The Ontario Teachers' Federation walked away from the table at 9:30 pm, Tuesday, September 9, after three days of around-the-clock discussions with the government.

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We have indicated a willingness to continue to talk to both the OFL with respect to Bill 136 and the Ontario Teachers' Federation with respect to the education reform legislation. For political reasons, the union leadership has decided to walk away from these discussions and engage in a war of rhetoric. This is an old-style tactic. They engage in fearmongering and hyperbole to whip up their membership. I think we have demonstrated in the past that that approach with this government is unproductive.

We are engaged in a difficult agenda of change. We are managing this period of change for the long-term benefit of all Ontarians, including those workers and their families in the public sector unions. I do not need to remind this House that it is our commitment to eliminate the job-killing deficit we inherited. We are determined not to leave our children with a crippling debt.

We are determined to deliver quality education for our children. We are introducing province-wide tests, standard report cards, and increasing emphasis on the basics. We will limit class sizes and implement a comprehensive plan to ensure our children can compete with anybody in the world. Next week, the Minister of Education will be introducing a bill to implement the necessary changes to

ensure our tax money is spent in the classroom, where it is needed.

By managing this difficult period of change, our goal is to maintain the services taxpayers expect and to enhance the overall quality of life in our health care system, in our education system and in every municipality of this great province. As we have repeatedly indicated, and here I'm quoting from page 20 of the Common Sense Revolution, "We are unconditionally committed to reaching our goals, but we are very open to discussing how we get there."

We were willing to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the teachers' federations and with the OFL. In fact, that's what we were engaged in, and we are prepared today to continue. However, the union bosses have chosen to leave the negotiating tables and engage in a war of rhetoric. We will not engage in this old-style exercise.

We as a government would have preferred to work with the union leadership to develop alternative approaches to achieving our goals. They have chosen to take another course. That does not change the fact that we have some difficult challenges before us. We want to continue to work with them and with all workers to ensure that all Ontarians continue to receive the quality service they deserve.

The changes that we were prepared to deliver at the negotiating table should not be jeopardized as a result of this most recent flight of rhetoric. Therefore, today the Minister of Labour will announce to the House the changes we were prepared to make at the table. We will remain committed to working with all public service providers in the interest of providing quality service at a reasonable price.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): In the months since the introduction of Bill 136, we have continued to meet with labour unions, municipalities, hospitals and other employers and employees to discuss the best way of ensuring smooth, stable and fair public sector restructuring. Our objectives are simple but firm: providing the necessary tools for restructuring, ensuring a smooth transition, and to be able to deal fairly with employees, both union and non-union, while providing better quality services at less cost to taxpayers. However, as we said on page 20 of the Common Sense Revolution, "We are unconditionally committed to reaching our goals, but we are very open to discussion as to how we get there."

In the case of Bill 136, public sector employers have shared this government's flexible approach to meeting these objections. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has indicated that it is critical that the two levels of government continually dialogue with each other on where we agree and where further work needs to be done. We are doing this.

Last week, the Ontario Hospital Association wrote saying it would support changes to Bill 136 that respond to union concerns, provided those changes "do not dilute the intent of the bill."

Individual unions as well as the Ontario Federation of Labour have suggested alternative ways of meeting our goals. Mindful that public sector employers have encouraged us to be open to change that addresses union concerns without compromising our objectives, the government intends to introduce a series of amendments to Bill 136. These amendments are the product of our dialogue with the trade union movement. The dialogue has been frank yet fruitful. It has produced a series of amendments that, if adopted by the House, would respond completely to concerns raised by the trade union movement about the contents of Bill 136.

The OFL has told us, "The right to strike is essential to free collective bargaining," and they have assured us that the retention of the right to strike would not jeopardize public service or create instability. Based on our discussion with the union movement, our amendments to Bill 136 would remove proposed restrictions on the right to strike.

Trade unions said that, upon restructuring, they want free collective bargaining for a first collective agreement. Our amendments would provide for this. The first-contract provisions of the Labour Relations Act would apply.

I would remind members that the existing first-contract provisions of the Labour Relations Act were introduced at the request of the trade union movement. They formed part of the Peterson-Rae accord, and in 1986 were passed by the minority Liberal government with NDP support.

During committee we will be seeking views as to whether a temporary public interest test should be applied during the first-contract negotiations.

The OFL said there is "no need or justification for the proposed Dispute Resolution Commission." Our amendments would eliminate the DRC.

The union movement has requested a return to the current legislative provision governing the appointment of arbitrators. Our amendments would do that.

The OFL has said there is no need for a Labour Relations Transition Commission, and they have said that the Ontario Labour Relations Board should assume the responsibilities and functions proposed for the LRTC. In fact, the OFL indicated that "the Ontario Labour Relations Board has a long and trusted history of independent and impartial adjudication." We agree. Our amendments would replace the proposed LRTC with the OLRB.

The OFL supports making provisions for expedited arbitration and for the use of other forms of arbitration. As they suggest, our amendments would apply these procedural reforms to the current arbitration system.

The OFL has asked that bargaining agent issues be resolved by continuing "to respect the democratic right of all employees." We agree. Our amendments would ensure that, following a restructuring, employees' choice of union representation be determined by a democratic, secret ballot vote.

During the last few months, we have also had separate, ongoing and very productive discussions with the Police Association of Ontario. These discussions have led us to propose a series of amendments to Bill 136 which we shall also introduce. We agree with the PAO on the retention of a separate and distinct arbitration regime for police. At the association's request, the existing Ontario Police Arbitra-

tion Commission, with a chair appointed by the government, would be retained.

We heard concerns from other associations such as the Ontario Nurses' Association regarding the important of continuing specialized bargaining units for professional staff. We will be addressing these concerns.

Our dialogue has also included the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. OPSEU is concerned that in the restructuring that involves employees currently represented by OPSEU, that union's name must appear on the ballot when employees in a new workplace vote on representation rights. We agree. Our amendments would address this very legitimate OPSEU concern.

It is with a sense of pride that I report on the outcome of our discussions on Bill 136. Our proposed amendments addressed completely the union's concerns about Bill 136 without adversely affecting the employers' objectives and without sacrificing and compromising a single one of our objectives. I would urge all members in this House to work cooperatively together, to support these amendments when they are tabled before the committee and to ensure prompt passage of this very important piece of legislation.

1400

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I want to begin by thanking both the Premier and the Minister of Labour for their wonderful performances. They give every impression that they are bargaining in earnest, that they have a genuine interest in bringing about a settlement and that they have the public interest at heart. This is nothing more than a very cynical attempt to manipulate public opinion, and I ask that our public keep their eye on the ball in this matter.

Let's begin with the record of a government which has as its hallmark, as its signature product, confrontation. These people thrive on confrontation. It is their very oxygen. Let's look at it from the beginning. Just a few months after this government sat we were faced with a labour strike and unrest outside on the very steps of this Legislature, something unheard of in the history of this province. Only a short while after that we had Bill 26, when we were forced to bring the Legislature to a halt because this government was trying to sneak in powers of an unprecedented nature in order to grab hold and bring about change in this government, which we are continuing to experience, notwithstanding.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I think in all fairness, the statements were allowed to be given with a minimum of heckling. I just ask the government to offer the same to the opposition.

Interjection: They've been told. The truth hurts.

Mr McGuinty: The truth hurts, Speaker.

In the fall of 1996 we had physicians throughout the province, specialists in many regions, forced to withdraw services and stop seeing new patients. We've also had hospital closures in small towns throughout this province force some of the largest public gatherings we've ever seen in the history of those small towns.

In March of this very year we had the megacity referendums where over 400,000 people came out and voted against this government's proposals. So when this government tells us that it is interested in listening and interested in learning and interested in bringing about change as a result of what they have heard, they are not telling us the truth. It's as simple as that.

Let's look at —

The Speaker: You can't charge them with that. You must withdraw.

Mr McGuinty: I withdraw that, Speaker.

Let's take a look at the specifics. The Premier would have us believe that once again they are bargaining in good faith when it comes to Bill 136. Let's understand that at the outset, before they drafted the bill they refused to consult our workers. Furthermore, they have now invoked a closure motion, limiting debate on this important bill in this Legislature. Furthermore, they have now told us that there will be four days of committee hearings only. Furthermore, there will be no travel of any kind whatsoever for those committee hearings.

I don't know if the Minister of Labour or the Premier has taken the time, but I was asked that they do this. They should talk to nurses. They should talk to our police. They should talk to our firefighters. They should talk to our bus drivers. Do you know what nurses want to do? They want to nurse patients. Do you know what teachers want to do? They want to teach our students. Do you know what our police want to do? They want to police our streets. Do you know what our firefighters want to do? They want to fight our fires. Do you know what our bus drivers want to do? They want to drive our buses. That's what they want to do. They don't want to go on strike, they don't want to be driven to the wall, they don't want to be taken to the precipice, and for some reason that is all this government wants to do. They are leaving them with no choice. They are hoping, they are praying that they will go out on strike, and this obviously is contrary to the public interest.

If they took the time, if they left this precinct and went into classrooms and went into hospitals and went into the occasional fire stations and talked to those men and women who serve us throughout this province, they would quickly understand that those people do not want to go out on strike.

This government, notwithstanding what the Premier told us today and notwithstanding the kind utterances of the Minister of Labour, has as its very intention to drive these people to the wall, to drive them out and to force us, the public, to experience the kind of pain that is going to come about. There's no doubt about it, and this government should not be mistaken in that regard.

People should keep their eye on the ball. Once again, this is a cynical attempt to manipulate public opinion. This government is not bargaining in good faith. This government has not taken the time, this government has not shown any genuine interest whatsoever, because if it were really interested in doing that, if it were really interested in doing the right thing, it would withdraw Bill 136. If it

refuses to withdraw Bill 136, then at a minimum it would give us more committee days.

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): Let me start off by saying that there is nothing in the Premier's speech today that surprises me, absolutely nothing. This government has wanted to have a conflict, this government has wanted to engage in rhetoric, this government has wanted to provoke a fight with public sector workers in this province for a long period of time. This government has from day one manipulated the agenda, manipulated their rhetoric so that they can be certain of having that fight.

Let's just reflect on how we got here. I remember that firefighters were here in the gallery when I asked the question of the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Is it true that the government is bringing forth legislation which is essentially going to wipe out many of the rights that public sector workers have fought for over the last 40 years? He had to admit that without any consultation with those public sector workers, firefighters, police officers, ambulance attendants, yes, that is what this government was going to do.

That is how we got here. You didn't talk to people in the first place. You just rammed ahead, determined to steamroller over people. When people said, "This is wrong, this is going to lead to a conflict, a provocation," you then engaged in a strategy to ensure that there was a fight. But you're going to play the public relations game on the way to that fight, and that is exactly what you're doing here today.

But people who work in the broader public sector are not going to be fooled. They know you have taken over $1 billion out of hospital budgets. They know what that means for patient care in our hospitals. They know what that means in terms of waiting lists. They know what that means in terms of people who are not able to get the quality of patient care they have had in the past. They know that you now intend to take some of that billion dollars out of the pockets of the very people who are working so hard in our hospitals and in our health care system to provide those services; now through Bill 136 and the other legislation, you're going to take the money out of their pockets. They know that.

Let's take a look at education. Talk about rhetoric, Premier. Your Minster of Education has been the chief of rhetoric from the very beginning, a Minister of Education who says he is going to create a crisis in education in order that he can wreak havoc on the education system.

You people have engaged in the rhetoric so that you can get to where you are going to go now: to provoke a fight with public sector workers, provoke a fight with teachers. But those people out there know that you've already taken, on an annualized basis, $1 billion out of education. They know that you plan to take another $1 billion, and they know what that's going to do to the quality of education in our classrooms. They know. They care about education. They care about teaching. They care about teaching kids. They know what you're up to, and they know that this is all a strategy to provoke that fight so that it can be the smokescreen while you pull the money out from underneath. That's what this is all about: You want to have a fight and you want the media who are here to focus on that fight. Meanwhile, you take another $1 billion out of education, and meanwhile you download $1.4 billion in new costs on to municipalities.

1410

The people who work in municipalities, the people who are the ambulance attendants, the people who give care to our children in day care centres, the people who look after seniors' apartments and seniors' housing, know what your agenda means. They know what it means in terms of a lowering of quality in ambulance services. They know what it means in terms of policing services out there in rural Ontario and small-town Ontario. They know what it means in terms of the quality of fire services when you take out this much money.

You want to provoke a fight with those people to cover up that ugly part of your agenda. While the fight is going on, while you've pushed all those public sector workers into that fight, you're going to use that as a smokescreen to take out the money.

I say to you, it's not going to go that easily. It's not going to go that easily out there. People don't want to have this fight. Those people who engage in teaching, those people who look after the elderly and the sick, those people who look after our children, don't want to have this fight. If you force them into it —

The Speaker: Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. As people woke up this morning, they picked up their papers to learn that there is the distinct possibility that hundreds of thousands of public sector workers would be going out in a massive strike some time beginning as early as next week. Maybe the saddest aspect of all of this was the gentle resignation with which so many people accepted that fact. There is a sense that we have seen this all too often before, a sense that, as I said just a few moments ago, this is what this government is all about. They're into confrontation, big-time. They're looking for crises. They love showdowns.

Premier, you didn't consult our workers before. You've invoked closure. You've restricted us to four days of hearings. You're not allowing the committee to travel. I'm going to ask you, Premier, why should we believe now, at the final hour, that you are genuinely interested in looking out for the interests —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Premier.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Let me share a little bit, and agree with the member, that there seemed to be a resignation. That kind of call, you would have

thought, might have been the headline instead of story four or five in the major dailies. The public reaction — our phones have not been extraordinarily busy one way or the other. The talk shows have been overwhelmingly in favour of the government.

What we've found, I think, is that there perhaps wasn't the same concern among the public, since they've heard that old game and that old rhetoric before. The fact of the matter is, we have been listening at the negotiating table with the OFL. We turned down not one of their requests. Not one single one of their requests was refused by the Minister of Labour at the table. We were actually quite surprised ourselves that they walked away from the negotiating table.

Mr McGuinty: The reason, Premier, that your phone isn't ringing on this issue is because people have given up on your government. They refuse to get their hopes up any longer.

Interjections.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): The line of the year is, "We have vision." Coming from you guys, it's a line

Interjection.

The Speaker: I think she said "line."

Mr McGuinty: Premier, I've spent a lot of time lately travelling around the province and I can tell you one of the questions I get time and time again —

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): We know you haven't been here.

Mr McGuinty: By the way, I've been in your ridings, just in case you want to know where I've been, talking to your constituents, and I'll tell you what people are saying. They were asking me: "What can we do? Because it seems to me that we just can't get the government of the day to listen. Tell us, what can we do?" There is an incredible amount of despair out there when it comes to our public and this government. They can't understand why you simply refuse to listen.

The reason we find ourselves on the brink of a disaster here in this province when it comes to labour relations is because you have stick-handled this all the way to the edge of the precipice. This has been very deliberate; there's no doubt about that whatsoever. You thrive on confrontation.

Premier, once again, why should we believe you now? Why should we believe that you are genuinely interested in settling this matter in the greater public interest?

Hon Mr Harris: I don't know who it is you're talking to as you travel this province. Every survey, every poll, every group is talking about enthusiasm, optimism, "optimistic about the future." Jobs are up, record job creation in the province of Ontario; interest rates down, unemployment down. Even the city of North Bay —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Ottawa West, I'm not going to warn you again to come to order. Member for Hamilton East, I'm not going to warn you again to come to order either. Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: All I can say to you is, I don't know who you're talking to, but I can tell you this: We had one union member I think in North Bay who talked about public sector job losses. What he forgot to tell you was that most of them occurred under the NDP. Second, he forgot to tell you that there has been significantly more private sector job creation in the city of North Bay, unemployment rate below 10%, for the first time in a long time, certainly since this government has been in power.

Is it good enough? Of course not. But there is a spirit of optimism and enthusiasm and hope for the future that were not there when you guys —

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

1420

Mr McGuinty: Do you know what they are starting to talk about out there? They are starting to talk about two lost years in Ontario. They're talking about a government that has lost sight of the needs of the people of Ontario. Go out there and spend a little time and, for example, talk to those who make a living on our behalf looking after the needs of children and ask them whether or not they think you are on their side. Go out there and talk to our teachers who, despite $533 million of cuts, of late —

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): Your cuts.

Mr McGuinty: — your cuts, imposed by your government — are doing their best to educate our students and ask them if they think they have your support. You go out there and talk to nurses, who are doing their damnedest to look after our patients in hospital wards, what few hospitals are left in this province, and ask them if they think you are on their side. Talk to our workers right across the province and ask them if they think you understand their needs, that you are with them when they want to do their very best for us. Ask them that, Premier, and you go ahead and tell me what you think their answers are going to be.

Hon Mr Harris: I have been. This morning I was at the Donwood clinic, where we have reinvested over $800,000, creating 14 new jobs in the last period of time. The employees, the nurses, the workers, the management and the volunteers there were excited about the new building, about the new commitment. They commented that this was a building that was planned under Premier Davis, under Premier Miller, under Premier Peterson, under Premier Rae, and finally after all that time Premier Harris opened it, delivered it and gave them the funding and the new jobs and the new programs that went along with it. That is what they are telling me.

That is in the public sector. In the private sector, 201,000 net new private sector jobs in the last six months alone — over 200,000 net new private sector jobs in the last six months alone. Those families are telling me, "We got a phone call that said, 'You got the job.' Thank you." They are now productive members of society. That is what I'm hearing.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): This question is for the Minister of Education and Training. You insist on telling us that your cuts are not hurting our students and that the $533 million you have stolen from the education system has had no adverse effect on education in Ontario.

I want to tell you about Victoria Eccles, who is a four-year-old student starting school for the first time this year, and she's enrolled in kindergarten. She was very excited about starting school with her friends in her home town of Wyevale and she was delighted by the fact that she lived eight houses away from her school. But at the last minute, Victoria's mom got a phone call saying Victoria couldn't start kindergarten with her friends, that she was going to be put on a bus, and she is going to be bused to Midland, an adjoining community, at least half an hour away from her home town, all of this because the board cannot afford to hire another kindergarten teacher to accommodate Victoria and five of her friends. She lives eight houses away from the school. Her school board cannot afford to hire the necessary teacher. She is going to be shipped via bus to the adjoining community to go to school there.

You tell me what to tell Victoria.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I don't think there is any question in anyone's mind that the general legislative grant program that has been funding education in this province for many, many years and all of the patchwork of regulations that go along with those grants doesn't serve the needs of our students. That is why this government announced many months ago that we were going to get rid of that system of funding that didn't meet our students' needs, didn't meet the needs of students in kindergarten, doesn't meet the needs of students in grades 10, 11 and 12 in Ontario, and replace that with a funding system designed to meet the needs of those individual systems. We are working very hard right now with experts in the field, with teachers, with students and with parents to make sure we get that funding formula right because we need to make those changes to have a quality education in Ontario. That is what I'd tell that student and the other students of Ontario.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, I understand that you can find comfort in academic discussions of programs and policies and substantial savings, but I want to bring you back to Victoria Eccles. She is four years old. She lives eight doors away from the school. Her plan and the plan of her parents was to send her to that school, and they were very much looking forward to it. Now the school board tells them they are going to have to ship their daughter, via bus, to the adjoining community. It's going to take at least a half-hour to get there by bus. She could walk to her school in two minutes. The school board is saying the reason they have to do this is because of cuts made by your government to their funding. They cannot provide education eight houses away to a four-year-old girl. I want you to tell me why this is a good thing for Victoria Eccles.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I think all of us regret that your government, when it was in power, didn't make the changes to a funding system that clearly doesn't meet the needs of students. It is regrettable that for whatever — a failing of imagination or courage, I'm not sure what kind of failing it was — you didn't address this issue.

We are addressing this issue. We don't believe the right choices are made in education. We have made that very clear. You have criticized me for criticizing a system that allows that kind of situation. We are taking action. We have asked the tough questions, we have listened to people and we are building a better funding system right now.

Mr McGuinty: As painful as it may be for the minister to accept, your cuts are hurting education, they are hurting our students and they are hurting our future. You have so far stolen $533 million out of our education system. You have told us you are going to get another $1 billion out of our education system.

So far your cuts have resulted in the closure of 25 junior kindergarten programs throughout Ontario. You know that experts have been telling us for a long time that the single best and most reliable indicator of academic success is readiness to learn in kindergarten. That is why junior kindergarten is such a valuable and wise investment. You have got to stop seeing it as purely an expense.

I'm going to ask you this and make it pure and simple. People of Ontario, students and parents, want to know when we are going to have a Minister of Education who stands up for education, who stops attacking education and who believes that students have got to come first.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I want to assure the Leader of the Opposition of this one thing, and you can count on this: As long as this government is in power, you won't see a Minister of Education defend a status quo that doesn't fund the individual needs of students across the province, you won't see a Minister of Education who defends mediocre student results, you won't see a Minister of Education who is happy until Ontario students have the best performance of any students in Canada. That is our objective and that is why we are willing to ask the tough questions, that is why we're willing to spend hours and hours listening to people on how to build that better education system and that is why we are acting on that now.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question to the Premier. Your Minister of Labour spoke glowingly today. We trust that she will table the amendments she is referring to because we want to see these amendments.

While I am talking about that, Premier, do you understand why all those people who work out there providing public services are angry? You brought in Bill 136 without notice. When a majority of the delegates at AMO voted to see Bill 136 withdrawn because they didn't want

it, you ignored them. Now your government is going to steamroller it through by means of time allocation and you are only going to allow very limited hearings here in Toronto. You are going to shut out all those people across Ontario who work so hard teaching our children, who look after our children, who look after public safety, who staff the ambulances. You're going to shut them out of the process. Do you understand why they are so angry? Do you understand why they are so hurt by what your government has done?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The unions had significant notice before the introduction of Bill 136. In fact, we accommodated a number of the requests as a result of about six months of meetings leading up to the introduction of Bill 136.

The problem with your question is, you premise it with a bunch of statements that don't come anywhere close to the reality of the situation. So you want me to answer questions and the questions have no basis in fact. That is the difficulty I have in responding to you.

We have consulted extensively with the union representatives. That, I think, has even been acknowledged privately to you. I know the public posturing is, you know, "We've got a convention this fall and we've all got to re-elected." I don't expect the union leaders to say, "Hey, this government's so good, stop paying your dues; you don't need us." I understand that. We don't expect it to ever go that far.

On the other hand, for the leader of a party that stripped away their bargaining rights, you have the gall to stand in this place when we have restored free collective bargaining and all the rights that go with it, something you took away during three years of your term.

1430

Mr Hampton: We know the Premier has his own interpretation of history. While the United Nations talks about Canada being one of the best places in the world to live, he refers to it as 10 lost years. I'd prefer to believe the United Nations.

But not to let the Premier get off the topic: Workers across this province who work in our hospitals, who work in our homes for the aged, who drive the ambulances, who look after child care, who make sure that our highways and our streets are safe, who provide us with fire protection, were very angry when you introduced Bill 136 in the way you did. What they then sought was the opportunity to have public hearings. They wanted public hearings across this province so they'd be able to tell their stories.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Question, please.

Mr Hampton: Your Minister of Labour said on June 4: "Yes, I commit to you that there will be full public hearings. We will travel the province, we will be in Toronto and we will listen."

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Harris: Let's set the record straight. Their anger was nothing compared to the anger when you and Bob Rae at the time stripped away their right to negotiate. Their anger was nothing compared to when you imposed the social contract without one hearing anywhere in the province, including here in Toronto. Their anger was nothing compared to that they expressed to you in the last election when the majority of card-carrying union members voted for the kind of change that would balance the books, give their kids a job, give them hope, bring this kind of change.

Your five-year record was net 10,000 fewer jobs in the province at the end of five years. That's your five-year record. They voted for the kind of change that has brought over 200,000 net new private sector jobs to this province in the last six months alone. That is the record, if you like, or the memory or the thoughts of the card-carrying union members we are providing hope and opportunity to, including their children.

The Speaker: Answer, please.

Hon Mr Harris: I don't know how you have the gall, when you stripped away their bargaining rights and gave them not one minute of public hearings, to criticize —

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Mr Hampton: My question was a very simple question. On June 4 in this Legislature the Minister of Labour was asked, would there be public hearings across the province on Bill 136. She said, "Yes, I commit to you that there will be full public hearings. We will travel the province, we will be in Toronto and we will listen."

What's happening here is this: All those people who want to provide health care services, who want to look after our elderly, who want to look after public security, who want to look after our children, who wanted this opportunity to have those public hearings, are now finding out that your government lied again, that this is simply a lie. That's why they're so angry. That is why they are so angry.

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: Premier, are you going to do what you said you are going to do? Are you going to —

The Speaker: Order. I'm sorry, I was preoccupied and I didn't hear it, but now it's been clarified. You must withdraw that statement. You can't make that comment.

Mr Hampton: Speaker, I can't withdraw that. It's clear. It's on the record of the House.

The Speaker: Then I will name the member for Rainy River, Mr Hampton.

Mr Hampton was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: I think we were all notified this morning that he wanted to be thrown out, and he was successful in that, one of the first things since being leader that he's been successful at.

Let just say to as many people as I can, I have here three pages of communities that will be accessible to hearings on Bill 136: Atikokan, Aurora, Aylmer, Bancroft, Blind River, Espanola, Fort Frances, Kenora, Manitouwadge, Mississauga, Moosonee, Nepean, Nipigon, even North Bay, Ottawa, Owen Sound, Parry Sound, Pembroke. Perth, Toronto; you won't let me read them all, but I'll be happy to share them with the members of the

committee and they can pick which communities — I think with video conferencing they can go to them all.

That's the commitment of this Minister of Labour, as opposed to the New Democratic Party that took away and stripped away bargaining rights with a piece of legislation that allowed absolutely no hearings. That's the difference between this government and this consultative Minister of Labour that we're so proud of.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. Since July 21, I've been calling for a public inquiry, joined by my colleague the member for Hamilton East, Dominic Agostino, to bring to your attention the fact that we need and desire and deserve a public inquiry in Hamilton. You have dodged and weaved and tried to avoid the fact that you have a responsibility under the law. Never mind changing the rules of why there ought to be one; the only threshold is a matter of public concern.

Let me say to you, here's who's on side with this so far. We've got local residents, firefighters, OPSEU, nurses, environmentalists, Oshawa city council, Ajax council, Burlington city council, Halton, Niagara, Toronto, Hamilton, Hamilton-Wentworth, Cambridge, the medical officer of health and the fourth editorial from the Hamilton Spectator. We've got firefighters and residents here in the gallery. I want you to stand in your place and tell them why they don't deserve and why they cannot have the public inquiry that you owe them.

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): I've said in this Legislature before that if there are any unanswered questions, we are willing to answer those questions. I've invited that member and the other member from Hamilton to forward to me the hundreds of questions which they've alleged are there. They have not forwarded those questions to me. I await their questions. I will answer their questions. We have answered the residents' questions. We have answered the medical officer of health's questions. We have answered the fire department's questions. We will provide all of the information necessary to anybody who asks.

Mr Christopherson: Since you refuse to show any respect to any elected official in our community regardless of what level of government they may be at because you believe it's politics at play, I guess, let me read to you from third parties who have an interest in this. How about the Hamilton Spectator again for the fourth time, and I'm quoting:

"To date, no one has offered a convincing reason why the province can't arrange for a concise but detailed independent examination of the circumstances prior to the fire. The air needs to be cleared on key issues: the supervision of the plant and the track record of its owners in meeting the fire code and hazardous materials storage requirements, the effectiveness of existing laws and regulations for companies that handle them," and on and on and on.

Hazardous Materials Management magazine — this is an industry magazine — raises questions about: Why wasn't the fire declared a hazardous material incident? Why wasn't a decontamination unit made available to the firefighters? They state that it's standard procedure that you overprotect, then downgrade in the case of an emergency. You turned back federal aid when it was offered and on the road to our community. Police didn't have adequate respiratory equipment.

There are lots of reasons to hold this inquiry, Minister. Stop holding out. Say that you'll do the right thing and hold a public inquiry.

1440

Hon Mr Sterling: The problem of course is that the member continues to put forward rhetoric, incorrect facts on which he is basing his rhetoric. Until he gets his facts straight, no rational decision can be made with regard to holding an inquiry. I believe I know the facts. I've invited him to present evidence to me that there is some kind of coverup or whatever. Nobody has at this point in time presented evidence to me that an inquiry is necessary.

Mr Christopherson: Minister, you just don't seem to get it; you don't seem to be listening. The law says the threshold for calling a public inquiry is "a matter of public concern." My community's been concerned since the first flame. The firefighters and residents who are here today have been concerned about this every day of their lives since this happened. There are unanswered questions. We have the most toxic hot spot in the nation.

We have over 200 firefighters who are now ill as a result of exposure. We had a hospital that never was evacuated; somebody was standing on the roof, and when they saw the smoke coming, pulled up the ventilation system. If for no other reason, other than to make sure that we can do the best job possible, you owe it to my community and my citizens and every other community where this might happen to find out all the details, put it on the public record and make sure it doesn't happen again. That can only happen with a public inquiry. Do the right thing and call it.

Hon Mr Sterling: The member mentions two issues. He mentions the health of the firefighters; he mentions the evacuation orders that were under the jurisdiction of the medical officer of health. I would remind the member that under the Municipal Act and the regional municipality act, the municipality can hold an inquiry into matters relating to their own firefighters and those matters.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I've warned you a number of times, member for Hamilton East, and I'm going to have to name you.

Mr Agostino was escorted from the chamber.

Hon Mr Sterling: Second, I might add that the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth can hold their own inquiry with relation to the medical officer of health if they feel there are questions relating to the decisions made by her. They have the opportunity to hold their own inquiries. If they decide to do that, I wish them well.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Education and Training. I want to bring to your attention once again the case of young Gordie Kirwan. I have raised his case in this House on two earlier occasions. On both occasions you promised that at the commencement of this school year Gordie would be able to enrol and continue with his education notwithstanding the fact that he is 22 years of age and has special learning needs. It is now September 18; school has been ongoing for a few weeks. The only reason that Gordie is enrolled in school today is because his parents had to fork out the money. You promised to look after Gordie and all others like him. I want you to stand up in this House right now and tell us why you have broken that promise.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I thought that the Leader of the Opposition would know that my office has been in contact with the Kirwans — and I have been personally — to work through this. We are all concerned with making sure that those students who are over 21 can access programs that allow them to develop as much as they possibly can, not just Gordie but also people in the same circumstances in Ontario. I think we've made some substantial headway on this over the course of the last few months.

We've assured the Kirwans — and I think you'll find they have been surprised by the amount of time we've spent on the file, the amount of response that we've had. I've worked with my colleagues to try to find the right solution, the right balance, for the needs of those students. We're working hard on that. I don't have any legislation I'm going to bring forward on it immediately, but I think you'll find that the Kirwans believe they have been well served in this regard.

Mr McGuinty: I can tell you without any reservation whatsoever that they do not believe they have been well served. They have been surprised by the amount of time that has been devoted to this, and surprised equally by the fact that nothing has come of it.

You said that at the beginning of the school year Gordie Kirwan and others like him, special needs students over the age of 21 in Ontario, could go to school and that our province would invest in them by paying for their education in those cases where they can continue to learn. He's there today only because his parents could afford to pay for him.

What about all those others throughout the province who are over the age of 21 and who have learning problems and who can't go to school as of this September? You promised that he would be there, and the Premier promised two and a half years ago when he happened to run into Gordie's dad and Gordie's dad bought him a cup of coffee and said, "Would you help me?" The then leader of the third party said, "Yes, I will." It is now September 18 and the only reason he is in school is because his parents have paid. Minister, when are you going to fix it as you promised?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Day in and day out we hear comments from the Leader of the Opposition that are simply not factual. I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that Gordie is in school this year and that his tuition is being paid for by the Ministry of Education and Training, as we promised the Kirwans.

The Kirwans are not interested in just their son; they're interested in all the children who have that difficulty, all the young adults who have that difficulty. Our bigger quest now is to make sure we meet the needs of all of those students.

Let's be very clear, because that is simply not factual: Gordie is in school this year, his tuition is being paid by the Ministry of Education and Training, and we intend to make sure that all of the young adults who are in that circumstance are well treated.

Mr McGuinty: On a point of information, Mr Speaker: I want to allow the minister the opportunity to correct the record.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): No. No such thing as a point of information.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a question for the Minister of Health. A couple of weeks ago I talked to you personally about repeated reports I'd had that patients and staff at St Thomas and London psychiatric hospitals were experiencing dislocation, that wards were being closed or combined, that critically ill patients were being kept on waiting lists, sometimes —

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Member for Fort William, you must withdraw that heckle. It's out of order.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): What the minister said is contrary to the fact. I'll withdraw the statement, "Untrue."

The Speaker: No, you get one chance. You must simply withdraw.

Mrs McLeod: I'll withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you. Member for London Centre.

Mrs Boyd: As I was saying, Minister, we spoke personally about the changes that were happening at the St Thomas and London psychiatric hospitals, contrary to the advice that was given you by the restructuring commission. The restructuring commission asked that no changes be made until there was some certainty about reinvestment.

I assumed you'd intervened, frankly, because there was an article in the London Free Press a couple of days later saying that there would be a moratorium on any of those changes, that layoffs wouldn't happen, that wards wouldn't close until you had made your announcement. But now I'm getting similar reports about changes that are exactly the same from the Brockville Psychiatric Hospital.

I guess what we need from you, Minister, is for you to clarify what your position really is with respect to the final recommendations of the restructuring commission as they

affect St Thomas, London and Brockville psychiatric hospitals.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): It's a little early yet. We're still undergoing analysis of the Health Services Restructuring Commission's final directives with respect to those areas.

I do appreciate that the honourable member has brought concerns to my attention, and each time I've looked into those. The last time we looked into it, there had been premature layoff notices sent out by management, which I think was highly inappropriate. We've put a moratorium on the closure of beds over the last two years so that the mistakes of the past, which all parties admit were mistakes, in the 1970s and 1980s won't be repeated with respect to people who are suffering with mental illnesses in this province. I appreciate the honourable member continuing to bring concerns forward, and I will look into them as she continues to do that.

1450

Mrs Boyd: Well, Minister, the time is getting short. These hospitals are to close by December 30, 1999. In the case of the London and St Thomas psychiatric hospitals, the commission recommended that they be transferred to St Joseph's Health Centre as of December 31 this year. So the time is getting short.

You own and operate, as Minister of Health, these psychiatric facilities. The commission can't order you to close them; they've advised you. We have patients, we have staff, we have families, we have affected communities, all wondering what is going to happen in very short order.

Quite frankly, it is inconceivable to me that you have delayed so long in announcing, first of all, whether you are going to accept the recommendation that you close the facilities for which you are responsible and, second, that you're going to accept the advice to reinvest the savings from those closures into the community so those services are there.

This is causing enormous anxiety not just in the London-St Thomas community but in Brockville as well. I want you to know that as the restructuring commission goes on, there are other cities that are going to be facing the same uncertainty. When are you going to make this decision? When are you going to announce what you are going to do about these patients, who are very vulnerable?

Hon Mr Wilson: I say with all respect to the honourable member that it's because the patients are vulnerable and because no party in this House has a good record with respect to treating these patients over the years that we are taking our time to get it right. We will not be pressured by media stories, we will not be pressured by various people who may or may not have other agendas.

I think our agenda is the same as the honourable member's agenda. That is to make sure that for these people who are in our psychiatric institutions and the mentally ill people in our province, of which there are many — and with the growing and aging population unfortunately there will be more people afflicted with mental illness — we take our time to do it right. We have a moral obligation to do that. That's what we're doing. We're doing an extremely careful analysis of what the commission has handed to the government in terms of its advice and directives, and we are working very hard to make sure we fully live up to our commitment to have community services in place before there are any major changes to the psychiatric hospitals in the province.

So we are taking our time to get it right. I would ask everyone in the process to just be patient, to continue to bring their concerns forward but be patient, because we do want to get it right.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My question is directed to the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. Last winter we received a report from the mandated advisory board about the voluntary sector. It was called Sustaining a Civic Society: Voluntary Action in Ontario. The report contained a large number of recommendations designed to support and enhance volunteers and their organizations in the province. Volunteers and the work they do are tremendously important to our respective communities, and people in my riding are asking what progress your ministry has been making since the report was released. What is your ministry doing to carry out the recommendations in that report?

Hon Marilyn Mushinski (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation): I thank the member for Northumberland for his question. I know his ongoing interest to support the work of volunteers in this province is greatly appreciated.

During Volunteer Week in April, I was pleased to announce the first of our initiatives to help strengthen and revitalize the voluntary sector. The voluntary linkages initiatives is a program that is designed to help voluntary organizations link with each other through technology networks.

My ministry is also working on the creation of a special achievement award which recognizes the efforts of youth volunteers. A public awareness campaign will be launched in concert with and after consultation with the voluntary sector, and plans for the Premier's round table on voluntarism and the role it plays in our society will also be announced shortly. Volunteer organizations will have the ability to access up to $180 million through our new charitable gaming initiatives. This is up from the current $10 million that charities currently receive.

Mr Galt: Volunteers are particularly concerned about personal liability, particularly when they're working for charitable organizations. Volunteer boards of directors are particularly concerned about the cost of liability insurance. I know that Bill 79, the Courts Improvement Act, when we get it passed, will provide some protection for volunteers on boards of directors. However, my constituents who are front-line volunteers are particularly vulnerable and they're concerned about their position.

You may recall that last December I presented a resolution to this House in private members' time, which was passed, to give some protection to volunteers in connection

with liability. What are your thoughts and what can we do to protect our volunteers from liability?

Hon Ms Mushinski: Although there is some confusion on this subject, the directors of charities have in fact legal power to use charitable moneys to purchase liability insurance for their volunteers. The directors, however, do not have the legal power to use charitable moneys to purchase liability insurance for themselves.

Under Bill 79, provisions have been made which will allow the government to permit directors of charitable organizations to purchase liability coverage for themselves. My government believes that the greater availability of liability insurance for all persons working for charities will address the issue of legal risk and encourage and promote people to offer their services as volunteers.

I know that this issue of liability coverage will be one of many which will be raised and discussed at the round table discussions held by the Premier later this year, and its importance to strengthening voluntarism as a whole.

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I have a question for the Minister of Health. I'd like to talk to you about MRI machines. We learned last week how you have created a two-tier system in this province, where some people are having to rent out through private insurance companies after hours because you won't fund enough of the cost of running MRIs in this province. Hospitals in local communities — not you, Minister — are paying large sums of money to put in place MRIs, but you're only paying one third of the cost. That's what we heard last week.

This week we learned that you are putting money into MRIs. The problem is they're in the United States. Last year you spent more than $1 million paying for MRIs in American hospitals, and you're going to spend $1.3 million this year at the rate you're going. There are applications even on the Internet to get MRIs funded by OHIP in the United States.

Minister, will you stand in the House today and tell us that you will fully fund the operation of MRIs in this province and stop the backlogs and stop the trips to the United States?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): The Health Services Restructuring Commission has directed the government to pay $1 million in operating costs for each of the MRIs to be installed in Metro Toronto. We've already done that, so proof is in the pudding. I don't know why you keep bringing this particular point up. Thunder Bay is getting $1 million in operating costs — unprecedented.

Your government paid nothing, because you wouldn't even bring in MRIs in the province. The NDP paid $150,000 a year, which was the policy up until the commission came in and said, "Government, you've got to pay more of the operating costs," and we agree. We've done that in Thunder Bay, we're doing that in Sudbury. We'll do that as we bring in the 23 new MRIs across this province, to bring the total to 35, more MRIs than the rest of Canada combined, so that people will not have to go to the United States.

Yes, in emergency cases where the MRI is not available nearby because of the failure of previous governments to bring in this new technology, we do send people and we do pay for people to go to the States. We will be able to end that with 35 MRIs in the province.

Mr Kennedy: This minister hasn't got a grip at all on what he's doing. Not one MRI in this province has received $1 million. It might be interesting for the minister to know the facts. He is still paying less than one third of the operating costs. He is still forcing hospitals to rent them out to private insurance companies so people can jump the queue, and even Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, every province pays more of the operating costs than you do today. People are interested in your actions, because they've heard your words and they don't fit. We've got the longest waiting list in Canada for MRIs, Minister, and you have not even named the sites of those MRIs you talk about and the places that you're going to go. You won't put the money into it.

Again, instead of funding MRIs in the United States, which you're doing to an increasing degree — and people are just getting doctors' signatures and going down there — Minister, will you tell us today —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Question, please.

Mr Kennedy: Some people think that you're stripping the health care system on purpose. Prove them wrong. Tell them you'll fully fund MRIs in this province and in this country. Tell us today.

1500

Hon Mr Wilson: Again the honourable member is in error. There were 12 when we came into office; there are 24 today, because we have opened 12 more. I don't really have anything else to say. I can name off the top of my head almost 11 of them. I'll give you a list of the 12, which I would be happy to send over to the honourable member.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Wilson: I don't think it's a figment of my imagination when last weekend we opened the new MRI in Barrie; it's a machine that's there, and patients are going through it. It wasn't a figment of our imagination when honourable members and I opened the MRI in Oshawa, or the one in Sudbury where the magnet was put in the ground about six weeks ago and it will be fully operation; Mississauga, St Catharines, Burlington to come on line, Brampton, Sault Ste Marie, Timmins, Thunder Bay and soon Windsor, and five more coming for Metro Toronto.

We are doing better than any other government in Canada. We'll have more MRIs than the rest of Canada combined. We're going to have modern hospitals with the newest technologies. Get out of our way. Let us move on with restructuring and increase the technology in our health care system, which yes, patients have waited very patiently for through your government and the NDP. We're moving.

CHARITABLE GAMING

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): My question is to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Yesterday you told reporters that your government would not force charitable casinos on unwilling municipalities but that the municipalities would have to be accountable to the charities for that decision. Minister Leach actually took it a step further and said that if a municipality rejected charity casinos and video slot machines, the charities in that municipality may have to forgo the revenues. You won't force the communities, but it looks an awful lot like you're willing to coerce the communities.

You must clarify this. If Barrie, Burlington, Belleville or Brantford, who have all said they are opposed to this, say no to your permanent charitable casinos, will the charities in those communities be treated any differently with respect to gaming revenues from the charities outside of those municipalities?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): To clarify things a little bit more — I thought I was quite clear the other day — what we're doing here is replacing an old system that didn't work. I've said this ad infinitum, constantly, in terms of what we're trying to do here.

Charities are participating right now in terms of the roving casinos, as they were under your government, as they were introduced under the Peterson government. We all know that part of the rationale for the charities to participate is that they need to participate to really gain something out of this gaming initiative. That was the whole idea that you had and certainly espoused when you were in government. The Liberals did as well. The idea is that for charities to benefit they must participate.

Clearly we're trying to provide an opportunity right now, with the new permanent charity gaming clubs, for these initiatives to be more accountable to the charities. This is what the problem has been over the years.

I can only share with you perhaps — here is something that was in the Sarnia Observer. This is an indication that —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Well, I'll finish the thought next round. What I want to say to you is that it is going to be far more accountable to the charities. That's the whole idea here. We're trying to help the charities.

Ms Lankin: Minister, you have got to answer this question. You seem to be suggesting that if there isn't a charity gaming casino in a municipality, then those charities cannot participate and therefore would not get the revenues. That's not what you said the other day. You said, for example, that Durham, which wouldn't have one of these, would participate in the Scarborough one. You've said before that there are other willing hosts in a 40-kilometre zone, that it doesn't have to be in a community. Make it clear. Otherwise, you're just being like a schoolyard bully: "It's my bat and it's my ball. If you don't play the game by my rules, I'm going to go home and take them with me so no one gets to play the game." Grow up, Minister.

There are communities that don't want video slot machines in their communities. There are others that you say are willing hosts. If you had started this process by going out and asking communities where they want to have these instead of handpicking them and forcing them and now coercing them, you wouldn't be in this mess. Start again and ask communities if they want these. Go from that premise. Respect local decision-making. Will you do that, Minister?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: I've been very clear. We have been consistent in saying we will not force communities to take any type of gambling initiative. We are talking about catchment areas here. I did not say that if you had a place in Durham, you could go in with Scarborough. I did not say that. I said we have catchment areas, that the catchment areas are to provide this opportunity, and it is an opportunity for charities to participate. It is an opportunity for charities to receive more in the way of revenue, what they didn't have before.

I will finish the thought I had before. This is from the Sarnia Observer and it says, "'This is good news for groups like the Blue Water Blades precision skating team,' said president Pat Kelly. She is optimistic Sarnia's charity casino will generate more money for her group and less commitment in volunteer time." They made about $8,000 before, but they're saying now that they are getting very little money for the effort they are putting into them. They believe that this new initiative, the permanent charity gaming clubs, is an opportunity for charities. They are an opportunity for more accountability to charities and they will benefit, and the charities know this. That is why in many communities we have willing hosts, areas such as Thunder Bay, for example, who understand —

The Speaker: New question.

NON-PROFIT HOUSING

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Many of my constituents reside in social housing. They have invited me to several town hall meetings to express their concern over shifting the costs of social housing to the municipalities.

Yesterday the Advisory Council on Social Housing Reform released its report on non-profit and co-op housing. Minister, is this report a workable plan? Can the minister assure the House and my constituents that the quality of social housing will be maintained and that people in need will continue to have access to social housing?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the member for Scarborough West for the question. I would be pleased to provide the House with further information on the advisory council's recommendation on social housing. The advisory council's report is extremely promising. They were excellent people and they produced an excellent report. It is a promising framework for the reform of social housing in Ontario.

We had asked the council to look at the current administration of social housing and they proposed a number of ideas that will aid with the transfer of housing to the municipal sector. My staff is currently reviewing these recommendations. However, it is important to remember the financial commitment this government has already made to improve social housing stock. Over the last couple of years, we've spent $500 million on repairing social housing, this year alone $100 million. Of course, the reasons for these upgrades and repairs is that the two previous governments let them go in rack and despair over the last 10 years.

Mr Jim Brown: There are some newer social housing units with relatively higher mortgage costs. How are municipalities going to pay these relatively high mortgage costs, and can you assure the tenants that they are not going to be forced to pay more?

Hon Mr Leach: I would like to respond to the member by reminding both him and the House of the efforts this government has made and already taken to ensure that funds are there for non-profit and co-op housing in the future. Our government this year reinvested $173 million into capital reserve funds for co-op housing. These are reserve funds, by the way, which the former NDP government dried up and drained as part of the cost-cutting measures while they were in government. Our government restored this money in order to ensure that co-ops and non-profit housing stock in Ontario becomes financially viable, not just for today, but for many years to come. We did this, before any transfer to municipalities, to put these co-ops and non-profits on a better financial footing.

Municipalities have been involved in co-ops and non-profit housing for many years. We feel confident that they will continue to manage social housing responsibly.

1510

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Education and Training. I have a copy of a receipt which I'm going to ask the page to provide to the Minister of Education and Training. A few moments ago in this House the minister stood up and said that his ministry had paid for the tuition fees of Gordie Kirwan. I am providing him with a copy of a receipt issued by the Ottawa Board of Education. It is marked "Receipt for tuition fees" from individuals. It's dated September 3, 1997. It says "Total sum received" for that month $1,036.80, fees for Gordie Kirwan attending Clifford Bowey for September 1997. The receipt was issued to his mother, Deborah Kirwan. Minister, may I have your explanation, please.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): Absolutely and certainly; I'm pleased to provide it, because the Leader of the Opposition is the master of half of the story. Yes, in fact the Kirwans had sent payment to the Ottawa Board of Education, so the Ministry of Education and Training has agreed to compensate the Kirwans for this tuition. The tuition will be paid for by the Ministry of Education and Training, just as I said. I don't know whether the Leader of the Opposition only has half the story or only wants to tell half the story. But I'm tired of that sort of question in this House.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Durham East, I'm not even certain where you sit any more, but I don't think it's there.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, you can't wriggle off this hook. A few moments ago you stood up in this House and said that your ministry had paid the tuition fees of Gordie Kirwan. I got on the phone with his mother, who couldn't believe that you had made that statement in this Legislature. She faxed to me immediately a copy of the receipt which she received as a result of her payment in the amount $1,036.80 for this month's tuition fees. You told me that your ministry had paid those fees. The fact of the matter is she paid for those fees. Will you stand up and just tell us the truth?

Hon Mr Snobelen: What angers me today is this. I think we've established very clearly that the Kirwans sent the cheque in; the ministry has agreed to compensate them, not just for this month's tuition but for the full year's tuition for Gordie. What disturbs me is this. There is a serious issue here and that is how to make sure that young adults over 21 who have developmental difficulties can get to the programs that they need to get to. That's the issue. That's what we've been working night and day on, to make sure, with my colleagues, that we get the right answer to that question, not just for Gordie but for all the young adults who have those circumstances in the province of Ontario.

To stand here in the House and twist this and make it a political issue over a young adult —

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): You are the one who is twisting.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I think that's just deplorable, because we need to address those issues for and on behalf of people with developmental disabilities across Ontario. That's what we're doing, not just for Gordie, but for all those young adults.

FISH HABITAT

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Today your staff, on your order, will no longer protect fish habitat in the province of Ontario on behalf of the federal Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans. Specifically, your staff will no longer review projects proposed in and around water to determine the impact on fish habitat; your staff will no longer investigate or lay charges under federal law against those who destroy fish habitat. We know that as of today, the federal government has no staff on the ground in Ontario to do this. They have seven biologists who work in Burlington who deal with fish management but who do not have the power to lay charges under the act.

You're the minister responsible for protecting resources in the province, including the fishery. Why are you not protecting the Ontario fishery as of today?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Minister of Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines): I want to thank the member of the third party for the question. It's the same question she asked in the estimates process, and we went through in some detail explaining to her that this is federal jurisdiction under the Constitution.

In 1989 the federal government entered into an interim arrangement with Ontario. We've asked that it be a permanent arrangement like they have with some other provinces. Quite clearly, after being told 11 months ago that this would be resolved in six months, and after a series of unreturned phone calls and declined meetings, the federal government obviously wants to maintain their jurisdiction over this area. I know that they care about fish habitat and the environment, and we're quite willing to let them carry on their mandated jurisdiction under the Constitution.

PETITIONS

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): I am pleased to present to the Legislature this afternoon a petition signed by hundreds of my constituents living in the townships of Murchison, Lyell, Sabine and Dickens in the district of Nipissing. These several hundred citizens are extremely upset at what they consider to have been the arbitrary, highhanded and unfair manner in which a vote was taken in the village of Whitney on or about August 16, 1997, having to do with plans for a municipal reorganization in that part of eastern, midnorthern Ontario.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by 35 residents, mainly from the Toronto area. The petitioners are wishing to ensure that the public is informed of bills with enough time to ensure that there will be public hearings so there can be amendments to the bills and they can be properly informed of what's going on in the House before bills are passed.

I support the petition and I affix my signature to it.

TVONTARIO

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): The people of Ontario want to have consultation for TVO before any privatization measure goes forward. I have a petition sent to me from residents of Schreiber, Ontario. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas TVOntario/TFO is owned by the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has opposed public support for maintaining TVO as a publicly owned and funded educational broadcaster by putting TVO through a privatization review; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has not confirmed that full public participation will be part of this privatization review;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to hold open and honest public consultation with the people of Ontario before making a decision on the future of TVO/TFO."

I thank the people from Schreiber for sending this petition in and sign my name to the petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Only about 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Women's College is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to teaching, research and care dedicated to women;

"The World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as its first collaborating centre for women's health in both North and South America;

"Without a self-governing Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and the world will lose a health resource that is not duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the comprehensive model of women's health pioneered by Women's College Hospital through ensuring self-governance of the one hospital in Ontario dedicated to women's health."

This is signed by more than 250 residents of the city of Metropolitan Toronto, and I am pleased to affix my signature.

1520

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I have a petition from a large number of citizens from Fort Erie, Ontario, that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ownership of a domestic animal or pet is a responsibility, not a right;

"Whereas owners have a responsibility to treat their pet with care and utmost concern for their wellbeing; and

"Whereas cruelty to animals should be punished and sanctioned with fines, penalties and/or bans on animal ownership; and

"Whereas inspectors of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals should not be obstructed

from carrying out their duties to investigate abuse and neglect;

"We, the undersigned, support the amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

I affix my signature to the petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): This is a petition on behalf of those fighting for good health care in Windsor, and we certainly appreciate the support we've had from our constituents on this issue.

"To the Ontario Legislature:

"We, the Windsor taxpayers, petition to keep our hospital rooms open and not to close entire floors due to a lack of funds from our government. With a population of 200,000 people and a new casino and other industries on the way, we as Windsor residents have a right to the same health care for our tax dollars as other large cities in Ontario. Our city is growing and we feel very strongly to keep our hospital rooms open.

"We ask the ministry to take this matter seriously and respond by reopening all the closed floors of the hospitals and designate adequate funding for the nurses so that we may be taken care of as taxpayers. Allowing hundreds of empty beds to stay closed while people are put in hallways for numerous days is a disgrace.

"As you will see by the amount of signatures, this issue will not be forgotten, nor will it disappear. We want our hospital rooms to be open and ready to care for the sick."

We have a significant number of names, Pam Gibb, Rose Lyncher, Vicky Warins, from all over Essex county.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition from my home town of Hamilton regarding the Plastimet fire and demand for a public inquiry.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins and furans, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire; and

"Further, we, the undersigned, request that the Ministry of Environment and the government of Ontario take responsibility for the immediate cleanup of the fire site."

I would point out that they finally had to do that because the money wasn't there and we told them to take over the cleanup of that site right from the beginning. I add my name to theirs.

COURT DECISION

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I am presenting some petitions on behalf of the member for Carleton from a Susen Shaver in Greely, Ontario. They read as follows:

"To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas at this time in the province of Ontario it is not illegal for a woman to appear topless in public, and due to the fact that this lack of restriction offends a large percentage of Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to introduce legislation that would make it illegal for a woman to appear topless in any public place, except in clearly marked designated beach areas."

There are over 600 signatures with that and 600 additional signatures without the last line, "except in clearly marked designated beach areas."

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Bill 156 has been introduced as a private member's bill which is entitled the Regional Municipality of Sudbury Statute Law Amendment Act, 1997; and

"Whereas this bill provides for the direct election of the chair of the regional municipality of Sudbury by a vote of the electors of the area municipalities; and

"Whereas the election of the regional chair will be held concurrently with the regular election in the area municipalities; and

"Whereas we, the electorate of the regional municipality of Sudbury, want to be part of the electoral process in electing a regional chair; and

"Whereas we, the electorate, believe that as residents of the area municipalities composing the regional municipality of Sudbury we have a right to decide who is elected to the office of regional chair; and

"Whereas we, the electorate, support Rick Bartolucci's private member's bill which lets the people decide;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the private member's bill enacting the Regional Municipality of Sudbury Statute Law Amendment Act, which will provide the taxpayers of the regional municipality of Sudbury with a voice in electing a regional chair, and urge the assembly to deal with this private member's bill immediately."

I've signed my name to this petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Health Services Restructuring Commission has issued directions calling for the closure of the Wellesley Central Hospital; and

"Whereas the Wellesley Central Hospital has played an integral role in the health care needs of the people of Toronto's downtown core; and

"Whereas the Wellesley Central Hospital has become well known for its focus on urban health, minimally invasive surgery and expertise with diseases of the immune system; and

"Whereas the Wellesley Central Hospital's busy emergency department sees 33,000 visits per year; and

"Whereas the Wellesley Central Hospital is Ontario's premier HIV/AIDS hospital and is located in an area populated with a high number of people affected by this illness;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to stand by its responsibilities for hospitals in the province and overturn the directions of the Health Services Restructuring Commission, thereby allowing the Wellesley Central Hospital to continue to serve its communities with excellence."

I am proud to affix my signature to this petition, with which I agree.

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I have a petition from a large number of citizens of the Fort Erie area, like Ken Jones of Fort Erie, and Elaine Berger of Stevensville. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ownership of a domestic animal or pet is a responsibility, not a right; and

"Whereas owners have a responsibility to treat their domestic animals with care and utmost concern for their wellbeing; and

"Whereas cruelty to animals should be punished and sanctioned with fines, penalties and/or bans on animal ownership; and

"Whereas inspectors of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals should not be obstructed from carrying out their duties to investigate abuse or neglect;

"We, the undersigned, support the amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

In agreement, I affix my signature.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I have a further petition addressed to the Legislature of Ontario with respect to protection for workers.

"Whereas the Harris government has enacted a variety of policies which will negatively affect the rights of workers in Ontario; and

"Whereas the proposed elimination of protections contained within the Employment Standards Act will further erode the basic protection afforded to working people in this province;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario reverse the unfair practices that have resulted in reduced protection and support for workers in this province and, in particular, that the proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act be withdrawn."

It is signed by a number of petitioners in my area. I concur and I will add my name to it.

ROCK MUSIC GROUP

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the rock group Marilyn Manson was permitted to play a concert at the Ottawa Congress Centre on Friday, August 1, 1997; and

"Whereas Marilyn Manson's wilful promotion of hatred, violence, immorality and obscenity has been linked to teen suicide and adolescent crimes across North America; and

"Whereas by allowing Marilyn Manson to perform at the Ottawa Congress Centre, a crown agency with a public mandate, helps legitimize the band and its unethical messages; and

"Whereas the Ontario Court (General Division) has ruled that Marilyn Manson's music does not meet the definitions of 'obscenity' or 'hate literature' in the Criminal Code;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the Liberal government of Canada to amend the Criminal Code in order to ensure that Marilyn Manson and other people directing messages of hate and derision towards vulnerable children and youth are not permitted to perform in Canada and to ensure that the messages which offend the moral and ethical sensibilities of Ontarians are not given a voice at venues financed by the taxpayers of Ontario, including the Ottawa Congress Centre."

This is submitted by Chuck and Betty Speakman of Nepean, Ontario, and I've affixed my own signature thereto.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): I am pleased to present a petition signed by 105 constituents from North Renfrew which reads:

"Whereas Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, imposes a new system of dispute settlement upon public sector labour relations which violates basic democratic principles by revoking the right to strike and denying the right to fair and impartial arbitration; and

"Whereas neither the Labour Relations Transition Commission nor the Dispute Resolution Commission can be considered independent or impartial, nor do they have the confidence of the workplace parties, and so fail to meet the internationally recognized standard for civilized labour relations practice as set out by the United Nations International Labour Organization, to which Canada subscribes;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned public sector workers and concerned citizens of Renfrew county, urge the government of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136 and strengthen the resources of the Ontario Labour Relations Board so that the existing collective bargaining practices and procedures can continue without political interference."

STANDING ORDERS REFORM

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): I'm very pleased to see that the government House leader is present. He can listen to this petition and no doubt will be able to do something about it so he can actually satisfy the people who have signed this petition. It deals with the so-called standing orders reform.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Order. There's no provision for proselytizing in the presentation of petitions.

Mr Gerretsen: I apologize for that, Mr Speaker. I was just trying to explain to you the nature of the petition. I will simply read it for you and for the House leader.

"Whereas the people of Ontario want rigorous discussion on legislation dealing with public policy issues like health care, education and care for seniors; and

"Whereas many people in Ontario believe that the Mike Harris government is moving too quickly and recklessly, creating havoc with the provision of quality health care and quality education; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has passed new legislative rules which have eroded the ability of both the public and the media to closely scrutinize the actions of the Ontario government; and

"Whereas Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, when they were in opposition, defended the rights of the opposition and used the rules to their full advantage when they believed it was necessary to slow down the passage of controversial legislation; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has now reduced the amount of time that MPPs will have to debate the important issues of the day; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government, through its rule changes, has diminished the role of elected members of the Legislative Assembly, who are accountable to the people who elect them, and instead has chosen to concentrate power in the Premier's office in the hands of people who are not elected officials;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon Mike Harris to withdraw his draconian rule changes and restore rules which promote rigorous debate on contentious issues and hold the government accountable to the people of Ontario."

I have signed the petition as I am in full agreement with it, and I hope the House leader will be able to do something about it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUBLIC SECTOR TRANSITION STABILITY ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 VISANT À ASSURER LA STABILITÉ AU COURS DE LA TRANSITION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 136, An Act to provide for the expeditious resolution of disputes during collective bargaining in certain sectors and to facilitate collective bargaining following restructuring in the public sector and to make certain amendments to the Employment Standards Act and the Pay Equity Act / Projet de loi 136, Loi prévoyant le règlement rapide des différends lors des négociations collectives dans certains secteurs, facilitant les négociations collectives à la suite de la restructuration dans le secteur public et apportant certaines modifications à la Loi sur les normes d'emploi et à la Loi sur l'équité salariale.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 17, I will now put the question.

Mrs Witmer has moved second reading of Bill 136. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; there will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1533 to 1538.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Johns, Helen	Sampson, Rob
Baird, John R.	Johnson, David	Saunderson, William
Brown, Jim	Johnson, Ron	Shea, Derwyn
Carroll, Jack	Kells, Morley	Sheehan, Frank
Ecker, Janet	Klees, Frank	Smith, Bruce
Elliott, Brenda	Leach, Al	Snobelen, John
Fisher, Barbara	Marland, Margaret	Sterling, Norman W.
Flaherty, Jim	Martiniuk, Gerry	Stewart, R. Gary
Ford, Douglas B.	Maves, Bart	Tascona, Joseph N.
Froese, Tom	Munro, Julia	Tilson, David
Galt, Doug	Murdoch, Bill	Tsubouchi, David H.
Gilchrist, Steve	Mushinski, Marilyn	Turnbull, David
Grimmett, Bill	O'Toole, John	Vankoughnet, Bill
Harnick, Charles	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Hastings, John	Palladini, Al	Wilson, Jim
Hodgson, Chris	Parker, John L.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hudak, Tim	Ross, Lillian	Young, Terence H.
Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Kennedy, Gerard	McGuinty, Dalton
Boyd, Marion	Kormos, Peter	Patten, Richard

Bradley, James J.
Caplan, David
Christopherson, David
Churley, Marilyn
Conway, Sean G.
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Kwinter, Monte
Lankin, Frances
Laughren, Floyd
Lessard, Wayne
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Pupatello, Sandra
Ruprecht, Tony
Sergio, Mario
Silipo, Tony
Wildman, Bud
Wood, Len

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 53; the nays are 25.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 17, 1997, the bill is referred to the standing committee on resources development.

SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES SERVICES

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 152, An Act to improve Services, increase Efficiency and benefit Taxpayers by eliminating Duplication and reallocating Responsibilities between Provincial and Municipal Governments in various areas and to implement other aspects of the Government's "Who Does What" Agenda / Projet de loi 152, Loi visant à améliorer les services, à accroître l'efficience et à procurer des avantages aux contribuables en éliminant le double emploi et en redistribuant les responsabilités entre le gouvernement provincial et les municipalités dans divers secteurs et visant à mettre en oeuvre d'autres aspects du programme «Qui fait quoi» du gouvernement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 16, 1997, I will now put the question.

Mrs Ecker has moved second reading of Bill 152. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The division bells rang from 1543 to 1547.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please stand one at a time and be recognized.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Baird, John R.
Brown, Jim
Carroll, Jack
Ecker, Janet
Elliott, Brenda
Fisher, Barbara
Flaherty, Jim
Ford, Douglas B.
Froese, Tom
Galt, Doug
Gilchrist, Steve
Grimmett, Bill
Hamick, Charles
Hastings, John
Hodgson, Chris
Hudak, Tim
Jackson, Cameron
Johns, Helen
Johnson, David
Johnson, Ron
Kells, Morley
Klees, Frank
Leach, Al
Martiniuk, Gerry
Maves, Bart
Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill
Mushinski, Marilyn
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Palladini, Al
Parker, John L.
Ross, Lillian
Runciman, Robert W.
Sampson, Rob
Saunderson, William
Shea, Derwyn
Sheehan, Frank
Smith, Bruce
Snobelen, John
Sterling, Norman W.
Stewart, R. Gary
Tascona, Joseph N.
Tilson, David
Tsubouchi, David H.
Turnbull, David
Vankoughnet, Bill
Wettlaufer, Wayne
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Young, Terence H.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick
Boyd, Marion
Bradley, James J.
Caplan, David
Christopherson, David
Churley, Marilyn
Colle, Mike
Conway, Sean G.
Curling, Alvin
Gerretsen, John
Kennedy, Gerard
Kormos, Peter
Kwinter, Monte
Lankin, Frances
Laughren, Floyd
Lessard, Wayne
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Pouliot, Gilles
Pupatello, Sandra
Ruprecht, Tony
Sergio, Mario
Silipo, Tony
Wildman, Bud
Wood, Len

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 52; the nays are 25.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 16, 1997, the bill is referred to the standing committee on general government.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's our party's understanding that Bill 156, An Act to amend certain statutes with respect to The Regional Municipality of Sudbury, which would allow for direct election of the regional chair, may be called today. Our party is ready to have the bill called for second and third reading today. To the Chair of Management Board, is it the intention of the government to call Bill 156 for second and third reading today?

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, this isn't question period. That is not a point of order. Orders of the day.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): Point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'll hold that for a moment. I recognize the minister.

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, the 50th order.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): The 50th order: Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for changes to the membership of the standing committees.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Nickel Belt on a point of order.

Mr Laughren: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The reason I rose when I did, before the House leader called the next order of business, was that it was my understanding that we were to proceed with the Regional Municipality of Sudbury Statute Law Amendment Act. We had given our assurances, along with the official opposition, that we would ensure a speedy debate and passage of that bill, and that's what we'd like to do.

The Acting Speaker: I think I covered that particular order, but let me rephrase it. It's the understanding of this Chair that those sorts of things are determined by your House leaders, have been in the past and will be in the future.

Hon David Johnson: If the request is for unanimous consent that would involve five minutes for the Liberals and five minutes for the NDP —

Interjection: Ten.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): Each Sudbury member.

Hon David Johnson: I'll buy 10 — five minutes for each member, 10 minutes, then the government would be prepared to give that unanimous consent.

The Acting Speaker: If you'll give me a minute, I'd like to have that in writing from the table.

I want to be sure of what you are requesting unanimous consent on and what the House is giving unanimous consent to: Unanimous consent for 10 minutes' debate by the official opposition and the third party on Bill 156, and to call that order now.

Would you like that repeated?

Hon David Johnson: Sorry, Mr Speaker. If I can just clarify, that's for second and third reading, the whole thing. That would be agreed to.

The Acting Speaker: Are you ready now? Is there unanimous consent? It is agreed.

Hon David Johnson: Then, Mr Speaker, I believe the proper wording is that I seek unanimous consent to call the 82nd order, second reading of a private member's bill, Bill 156, An Act to amend certain statutes with respect to The Regional Municipality of Sudbury, which stands in the name of Mr Bartolucci.

The Acting Speaker: There's unanimous consent to call that order: Agreed? Agreed.

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF SUDBURY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE DE SUDBURY

Mr Bartolucci moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend certain statutes with respect to The Regional Municipality of Sudbury / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant certaines lois en ce qui concerne la municipalité régionale de Sudbury.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Certainly it's good news for the people of the regional municipality of Sudbury to have this bill called before the Legislature today for second and third reading. Let's outline a few of the reasons why this is not only timely but extremely important for the people of the regional municipality of Sudbury.

We all know, because we made a statement in the House earlier, that the chair, Tom Davies, will no longer seek the position, the honour, of chair of the regional municipality of Sudbury due to ill health. We bid him good luck in the future, and we're all with him.

While Tom was the chair, this region, the region of Sudbury, felt very secure in the direction it was going. The chair led us through some very difficult times. Being the experienced politician he is, he was able to work with all levels of government and all different governments.

There is now a time of change at the regional municipality of Sudbury. It's now important for the people to have their voice so that they can decide who will be elected as the chair of the regional municipality of Sudbury.

This is a decision that wasn't arrived at easily. There were extensive public meetings, extensive debate by a committee of regional council. At the time, it was decided by that council to not have direct elections of the regional chair because of the sensitivity which presents itself to the region and also to every other municipality in Ontario, and that of course is the bill we just finished passing, Bill 152, the downloading exercise of this government.

It was decided that Tom, the present chair, was needed to lead us and to direct us. But the rules of the game have changed, not because Tom wanted them to change, not because this region wanted them to change; they changed because Tom has an illness that will not allow him to continue on as the chair after this mandate is over.

1600

The region was quick to act. They held a special meeting and they decided that now is the time to allow for direct elections. So a special motion was presented to regional council and it was overwhelmingly passed. The vast majority of regional councillors decided that the people they represented wanted a direct election of the chair of the regional municipality in Sudbury.

At that time, they decided to send down a delegation to meet with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That meeting took place with representation from all three local MPPs as well as a delegation of three. At the urging of Councillor John Fera, my private member's bill was introduced to help expedite this event happening, to help expedite the fact that the people deciding is the purest form of democracy and should be incorporated into the next municipal election.

It was a very good meeting. There was an excellent exchange of ideas from all the people who were a part of that meeting. It was decided at that time that clearly it was the direction we should be taking, that an amendment should be made to ensure the direct election took place.

But there were some concerns on the part of the government, and I would say legitimate concerns. They wanted not only the perception of fairness but the reality of fairness. It was a concern that was debated by all the people at the meeting. The consensus was that if we acted on this bill quickly, the perception and the reality of fairness would be there.

Second, there was a concern that this might have an undue advantage to the person who won this election for the 2000 election, and that was debated extensively around the table. It was decided that if this happened now there would in fact be the opportunity for fairness throughout the system, because it would allow for anyone interested in running for regional chair to put his or her team together; it would allow for a fair nomination period; it would allow for a fair campaign period; it would allow for a fair exchange of ideas, so that in fact and without question everything would be aboveboard and considered to be in order. This would lead to the changes that may take place in the year 2000 but would not be a part of the changes that may take place in the year 2000.

It was imperative and I think it was a consensus — the member for Nickel Belt may want to address it later — that we should move very quickly, that this should be a standalone item, that it shouldn't be one that we use as a bargaining chip, that the people of Sudbury, the residents of the regional municipality of Sudbury deserve the respect from all three parties to deal with this as a standalone issue and not to be used as a tool for further negotiations. I believe that has taken place today.

The government has called this for second and third readings. If it passes, and I hope it does, then royal assent can be given and we can get on with the process of campaigning for the first time for the chair of the regional municipality of Sudbury.

It also does something else. It allows for the opportunity for an individual or individuals who may have partisan politics as their foundation for running to become a part of the process at the municipal level, at the regional level. I don't see anything wrong with that. I believe that's healthy. I believe that in a direct election the people get who they want because the majority speaks.

I'm also very happy and proud of this House today for calling this for second and third readings, because it clearly sends the message to the people across Ontario that, first, a private member's bill that has substance and importance will be dealt with and, second, that an opposition private member's bill, if it has merit, will be accepted by the government and by another party. If passed, it will be record time indeed for first, second and third readings with royal assent. I think that sends a very good message, to not only the people of the regional municipality of Sudbury but also the people of Ontario, that indeed a bill can be introduced on September 8 and passed on September 18 because everyone in this House believes democracy at its fullest is indeed the direction that we as provincial politicians want Ontarians to believe is our goal.

I hope that when it comes time for the vote this is carried unanimously, because democracy at its purest is always the example that we as politicians, whether we be at the federal, provincial or municipal level, want to set. I commend the Chair of Management Board for bringing this forward, I commend him for listening and I only hope that this bill is supported by everyone in the chamber today. It clearly sends the message that when in Ontario we allow for direct election we are allowing the people to decide what and who should represent them.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): I rise in support of this bill to provide for the direct election of the regional chair in the municipality of Sudbury.

There has been a lot of behind-the-scenes work done to make sure that we arrived at this point here today, and I would like to extend a note of gratitude to the parliamentary assistant to the minister, Mr Ernie Hardeman, the MPP for Oxford. Mr Hardeman agreed to a meeting in Toronto last week at which there were in attendance myself; somebody from the office of the member for Sudbury East; Mr Bartolucci; Mr Fera from the town of Nickel Centre; Mr Jim Gordon, the mayor of Sudbury; and most important, Mr Lionel Lalonde, the mayor of the town of Rayside-Balfour in my own constituency.

At that meeting, the case was put most eloquently by the people from the Sudbury area as to why they wanted direct election of their chair. They put it most eloquently and received what I thought was a very fair hearing from Mr Hardeman. Mr Hardeman then took the matter to the minister, who obviously agreed to proceed in this manner.

It was important that we proceed with despatch because it would be unfair to leave it too late because that really would give an advantage to one of the people on the regional council in case someone else wanted to challenge for that position as well. It's important that the government recognized that and agreed to proceed with it today. I'm sure there were temptations to hold this back and use it as a bargaining chip to get something else through. But that was not the case and we are now proceeding with it.

This is a popular move, not just among the regional council itself, but among the people of the Sudbury community. This will be well received in the regional municipality of Sudbury. It's probably overdue that there be a direct election for the regional chair. It's not an easy job riding herd on a number of municipal councils. We were well served in the regional municipality of Sudbury by the person who chaired the region for the last I guess 10 years, Mr Tom Davies, and many of the members here will know Tom Davies.

1610

Mr Bartolucci: Fifteen years.

Mr Laughren: It's 15 years, I'm reminded, that he chaired. He did a very good job and he had a unique ability to put others out front while he himself did the job of chairing without seeking the limelight. It's very unfortunate that Mr Davies is ill and will not be able to carry on his duties or to stand again for regional chair. The people in Sudbury owe him a very large vote of thanks for the work he has done these many years.

I will sit down and allow my colleague from Sudbury East to make a few remarks, because she too represents part of the regional municipality of Sudbury. Once again I express my appreciation to all those who have made this possible today.

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I'm pleased to participate in the debate. I will speak only very briefly because there are other issues we need to deal with. I appreciate that the government House leader has asked for and pushed for unanimous consent that we might deal with second and third reading of this bill today.

As has been mentioned already, the purpose of the bill is to allow for the direct election of the regional chair so that that individual be elected at large by the citizens within the regional municipality. In many ways that is a very historic change in our community. It is true that since the inception of regional government in our community, which would have been in and around 1973, the regional chair has always been selected by his or her peers and that practice has continued right from the inception of regional government to this point.

I think it's fair to say that process was strengthened over the last 15 years based very much on the individual who was regional chair, Tom Davies. It was a measure of both his personality and his strength and his very hard work on behalf of the people of the region that that process remained intact, that regional councillors agreed with that process and I think that the population at large in the regional municipality of Sudbury agreed with continuing that particular way of doing business, which was to select from among one's peers.

But it is a time of change. It is clear that the regional chair, who has been very popular, who has held this process together, is now not in a position to continue. He is ill and we all very much regret that, but both regional council and I think the population in general in the area we come from believes that the time for change is now. That time for change means very specifically that we move to a process of direct election of the regional chair from among the population at large.

I support that process. I very strongly believe that it is a fundamental principle of democracy. I think that process, direct election by the public, will strengthen accountability of the regional chair to the citizens in the region that he or she will serve. I'm very supportive of the mechanism that will now be in place once this legislation passes. I just think it will be a much better process from here on in. That's not to undermine the work that has been done or the decisions that have been made in the past to maintain the structure we have operated under since 1973, but I believe as a fundamental tenet of the democratic process in this province that we will be as well served or better served by a direct election by the population at large.

I would like to thank the three representatives from the regional municipality of Sudbury who came to Toronto last week to meet with the parliamentary assistant. That meeting was attended by the member for Nickel Belt and the member for Sudbury. I myself on that particular day was in court with my colleague the member for Welland-Thorold, dealing with another matter that this House has an interest in, so I was unable to attend. My constituents have a great interest in the family support plan and the reason for us being in court that day. But I had a representative there. I would like to have been involved but could not. I know that a great deal of discussion went on. A number of issues were raised, it seems they have been successfully dealt with and we are pleased to be here today to deal with this private member's bill to move this issue forward.

Once again I'd like to thank all those who were involved. I would like to commend Chair Tom Davies for the valuable work he contributed while he was in office. I am certain that his successor, who will have a difficult row to hoe, will do the very best job he or she possibly can. I think the citizens at large very much agree with the move we are making today, to move to direct election, and they will be supportive of that process when they go out to vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Mr Bartolucci has moved second reading of Bill 156. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Bartolucci moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend certain statutes with respect to The Regional Municipality of Sudbury / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant certaines lois en ce qui concerne la municipalité régionale de Sudbury.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Harmonious House.

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, we hope the harmoniousness continues with the 50th order.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

COMPOSITION DES COMITÉS

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for changes to the membership of the standing committees.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I rise to complete the leadoff of remarks on behalf of our caucus. When I was last speaking in this debate, I was referring to the number of bills, the very large agenda of the government, which are being referred to various standing committees that are established by this motion. I had talked specifically about the download bill on the Who Does What process the government is engaged in and what it will mean for various municipalities in this province.

I had referred to a periodical that is well respected in this province, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record. I'd like now to refer to another equally respected periodical, the Burlington News.

In the Burlington News dated Saturday, August 23 of this year, there is a report on a discussion of the effects on taxes of the download by the provincial government to the municipalities, a number of bills that have been introduced and are being referred to various committees.

In the report, Burlington councillor Denis Lee, who is described as a card-carrying member of the provincial Tory party, joined his colleagues on the council in condemning this government, the Harris government, and local Conservative MPPs for acquiescing to the agenda put forward by this government.

I'd just like to refer to a statement made by Mr Lee, who said:

"We have to embarrass and highlight the quiet voices of our provincial members in this whole affair. They are not listening to their constituents, who are also our constituents.

"We have to bring them to the fire with their bare feet and hold their bare feet there until they listen."

I guess a number of the local MPPs in the region of Burlington are going to get their feet burned, except apparently for Oakville South MPP Gary Carr, whom one of the other councillors, Kevin Flynn, described as a breath of fresh air, because Mr Carr, according to the report in the Burlington News, has openly disagreed with his government on the downloading. In that respect, he is considered by the councillors from Burlington to have properly represented their concerns and the concerns of the people of Burlington, unlike the other MPPs representing the area.

I just hope that when we deal with these bills in committee, particularly Bill 152, the so-called Services Improvement Act, the other MPPs from the Burlington area, as well as the Conservative MPPs representing other constituencies who are represented on the committee that will be dealing with Bill 152, will speak for their constituents rather than just parroting the mantra which has been given to them by the treasury bench.

1620

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: While I share the member's wish, since there aren't enough members in the House to make a quorum, I think it's a faint hope. Would you check for a quorum?

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Is there a quorum?

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Algoma.

Mr Wildman: I am pleased that the members have been able to come in to listen to my speech.

I wanted to move from my analysis of the effects of the download, the tremendous increase in property taxes that ratepayers are going to experience across Ontario because of this government's transfer of services and costs to the municipal level of government, and the fact that most of the Conservative members of the Legislature have not had the fortitude to actually stand for their constituents, and instead have simply been parroting the mantra given to them by the treasury bench. I do want to once again congratulate Mr Carr, the member for Oakville South, because, as he is described in the Burlington News, he is indeed a breath of fresh air for speaking up for his constituents, unlike most of his colleagues in his caucus.

I would hope that on the committees, and I mean this quite seriously, the members of all parties, the members of the party supporting the government and the opposition parties, will speak for their constituents rather than speaking to their constituents on behalf of the Premier, and not even speaking to their constituents. I guess a better way of describing it would be speaking at their constituents.

I want to deal specifically with what has been the central issue brought to the Legislature today, brought to the Legislature by the Premier in his statement to the House and then followed up on by the Minister of Labour. That was Bill 136, which is designed to take away the rights of workers to free collective bargaining by constraining arbitrations, by taking away the independence of arbitrators and by taking away the right to strike, to withdraw services.

The Premier and his colleague the Minister of Labour tried to argue that they have listened to the Ontario Federation of Labour representatives, that they are prepared to make changes, that they are prepared to make amendments, but then they are unwilling to table those amendments and to let us know what the amendments are going to be. Instead, at the very time that they were supposedly listening to the representatives of the labour movement, the government moves yesterday on a time allocation motion on Bill 136 which will only allow for one week of hearings across the province, and only during a time when the House is sitting, next week.

I want to deal specifically with the issue that was raised by my leader in the House today. I have an excerpt from Hansard of June 4, 1997. That was a debate in this House, and questions were raised at that time about the bill, the bill that would take away the rights of workers. The Minister of Labour was asked specifically if she would commit the government to full hearings on this legislation across the province, and I have here her reply. She said: "Yes, I commit to you that there will be full public hearings. We will travel the province." That's a direct quote from the Minister of Labour in June.

Now we have a time allocation motion before the House which does not allow for travelling across the province. My leader stated the obvious, and for that he was asked to leave the chamber. The minister made a commitment in June and the government in September does something completely opposite.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): What about teleconferencing?

Mr Wildman: The minister did not say in her remarks on June 4, 1997, anything about teleconferencing. She said, "We will travel the province." Travel, not travel electronically. "We will travel the province, we will be in Toronto and we will listen." She didn't say they would be in Toronto only; she said they would travel the province. Everyone understood that to mean exactly what she meant it to mean: that there would be hearings in Toronto and there would be hearings across the province.

Mr Frank Klees (York-Mackenzie): That's not what she said.

Mr Wildman: I suppose the member for York-Mackenzie's response to my remarks is an example of how insincere the government is when it makes these kinds of commitments. He thinks it is quite funny. He thinks it is hilarious that the Minister of Labour would make a promise to the leaders of the labour movement, to the workers in this province and to the public of this province in June, and then the government will renege on that promise in September. He thinks it's funny. He seems to think it's quite hilarious that a minister of the crown gives her word in June and then the government of which

she is a member goes back on that only a few months later.

How are we to understand this? How are we to believe that the committee will be serious in listening to people if the majority of the people who want to make presentations will not be able to participate? How are we to understand the government's position when at a time they are negotiating with the leaders of the labour movement, behind the scenes in the House leader's office and the Premier's office they are plotting to move forward without giving the members of the labour movement any opportunity to have real input?

1630

Most of us will be tempted to understand that the so-called negotiations, the dialogue with the labour movement, were simply a façade, that the government intended to move forward on this legislation denying the rights of workers and to do it as quickly as possible and they just put up a façade of negotiations with the leaders of the labour movement. Public sector workers are going to get hammered by this government. The government tried to cloak that hammer with some cloth, but when the sledge hits the head, it still feels the same way. The fact is, this government always intended to move forward as quickly as possible to remove the rights of public sector workers to free collective bargaining. They're doing it with this time allocation motion.

When the government says they are prepared to listen but won't give us the amendments, won't tell us what amendments they're prepared to make, we suspect there will be nothing substantial and that the workers will in fact be hammered by this government.

All I can say is that it's here in black and white. On June 4, 1997 the Minister of Labour said: "Yes, I will commit to you that there will be full public hearings. We will travel the province." The government now has moved a motion and forced a vote today because of a time allocation motion that refers Bill 136 to the resources development committee next week. They will hold hearings all next week. Everyone knows that the rules of the House preclude a committee travelling while the House is in session, so they will not travel the province despite what the Minister of Labour said.

Mr Wettlaufer: Teleconferencing, Bud.

Mr Wildman: That's not travelling the province. That may be called virtual travel, but it isn't travel.

Mr Wettlaufer: You can reach more people.

Mr Wildman: You won't.

In the Premier's statement today, he said that next week the Minister of Education and Training will be bringing forward his bill to change collective bargaining in the education sector. We've already had education legislation in this House that significantly changed the way education is governed in this province, Bill 104. That was referred to committee only after a lot of argument by the opposition. They did travel the province. They only went to a few communities, four or five, but they did travel. But the committee was unsuccessful in persuading the government to listen, to respond to the concerns raised by the people who appeared before that committee.

I was quite encouraged by the work of that committee. On two occasions that committee voted unanimously — all MPPs from all parties on the committee voted unanimously — to request that the Minister of Education and Training and the Education Improvement Commission consider changes in the boundaries of the proposed new school boards. Specifically, what produced that motion by the committee was a presentation made by representatives of the Hornepayne Board of Education, in my own riding. That board requested that their status be changed to that of a school authority. The committee members were persuaded. They moved motions to request the government and the Education Improvement Commission to respond. When the minister then responded, he didn't make the changes that the committee had requested.

He did make some changes in the northwest; I'll give him that. But he didn't respond to the concerns of Hornepayne. As a matter of fact, he put Hornepayne into another school board, which made that the largest proposed school board in the province as a result. He didn't respond to the concerns of the people in eastern Ontario, who will now have a board that consists of Lanark; Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry; Prescott and Russell.

Even when the committee works well together, when they listen to the people — and it doesn't happen very often, unfortunately, under this government — and they make recommendations, their recommendations aren't listened to by the government.

Do we have any confidence that this new education bill will be introduced and will be dealt with in a way that makes it possible that those concerned — parents, students, trustees, teachers, members of the public — will be able to have input and will be able to influence the government to ensure that the changes that are brought in will not force a confrontation and a disruption of education for kids in Ontario? I don't think so.

We know what's in the draft legislation. The government will have the power to make regulations concerning the length of the school day, the length of the school year, class size and other matters which up to now have been subject to collective bargaining between teachers and school boards. The legislation will allow the minister to make regulations on the use of people in classrooms who do not have teacher certification in this province. There is only one reason why the minister would want to do this. He wants to take money out, and by bringing in these kinds of less qualified people to teach in our classrooms, thus affecting the kind of education our kids will receive, he will be able to pay them less and get the money out.

The government has said they want to take an extra $1 billion out of education, over and above the millions of dollars they've already taken, that they are determined to do that and that is non-negotiable. The government, again, has put up a façade of negotiating with the teachers. Representatives of the minister's office went to meet with the teachers' representatives. They had discussions, but they started off from the point of saying the government is

going to take the money out and that is non-negotiable. Even when the teachers' representatives put forward another proposal, an alternative, which would have made it possible for the government to receive savings —

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I don't believe there is a quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker: Clerk, can you check to see if there is a quorum?

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Algoma.

Mr Wildman: The government has said to the representatives of the teachers that it is non-negotiable. The government is going to take the money out, they're going to take another billion dollars out of education. This is forcing teachers, who do not want to disrupt the education of their students, to the brink. The government wants a confrontation, they are pushing for a confrontation and, unfortunately for the students of this province, I'm afraid they're going to get it.

Mr Wettlaufer: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I've been listening to the member for Algoma —

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, I can't hear you. Can you speak up?

Mr Wettlaufer: I've been listening to the member for Algoma for nearly 17 minutes and he has yet to talk about the membership of the committees in this debate.

The Acting Speaker: Member, go ahead. Frankly, I have been listening and I believe the member has mentioned at times — I believe he is speaking to the bill. If you are not, please do.

1640

Mr Wildman: I'm talking about the formation of committees that will be studying these pieces of legislation. I'm hoping that the members of the committee will take seriously the representations of students, parents, teachers and others who have an interest in education on this bill that is being introduced, according to the Premier, next week, because that bill is part of the whole Who Does What downloading. The government has tried to justify the other bills it is sending to committee on the Who Does What process by saying that in transferring these other services and costs to the municipalities, they are compensating the municipalities by taking over 50% of the cost of education, without telling us what the formula is going to be for education in the province.

The government, in referring most of these bills to the committees we are forming in this motion, is doing it by time allocation and is constraining the work of the committees so that the committees will not be able to hear all of the people who want to make representations. They are moving forward like a steamroller because they want a confrontation. They are prepared to use the people of this province who receive public services and the kids who attend the schools in this province as pawns in a power play against the teachers and the other public sector employees in Ontario. It is completely unacceptable for a responsible government to act in this way, and it is unacceptable for members of the committees that we are forming under this motion to support the government in this process.

It is incumbent on members of the committee to speak for their constituents as the Burlington News says Mr Carr, the member for Oakville South, does. It is incumbent on all members of the committee to listen, to ensure that there is enough time on committee for all of the deputants who want to make representations on the various downloading bills, including the education bill, to have their say and to listen to what they have to say, to respond to what they have to say and to make representation to the government requesting the government to back off, to rethink and to look at the implications of what they're doing. Because we are threatening public services in this province, we are threatening the education of our kids.

The members who are put on the committees under this motion have the responsibility to speak for the people of Ontario — not to speak at the people of Ontario, representing only what the Premier and the Treasurer want to have said. It is their responsibility to persuade the leaders of this government to listen, to preserve public sector jobs, to preserve public sector services in this province and to preserve, above all else, education for our children in a way that is going to serve their needs for the future of this province.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Wettlaufer: Much of what we are discussing here today relates to changes that our government has attempted to make regarding streamlining. I notice that the member for St Catharines has participated in the debate and much of his opposition to the changes in the standing orders relates to the fact that he is up many, many times discussing or prefacing his remarks with a reference to the speed with which our government is acting or, as he says, the reckless abandon, or that we're moving too quickly, or that we are creating havoc, or that we are acting with radical and reckless revolution with severe consequences.

Our government had a program and we were elected with that program. We have committed to balancing the budget within the term of our office. We also agreed that we would spend at least $17.4 billion on health care. What we never hear from the member for St Catharines or the members of the opposition Liberal Party is how that government would have balanced the budget in four years, because that was their commitment during the campaign. I wonder how fast that party would have had to move in order to attain their goals.

Mr Wildman: Speaker, on a point of order: I have listened very carefully for the beginning of these remarks, in relation to the point of order that the member himself raised about my speech. He hasn't yet mentioned anything about committees or the membership of committees.

The Acting Speaker: Let's give the member some time to come back to the committees.

Mr Wettlaufer: I'm building up to that. I have to give this background.

We also never hear from the Liberal Party or from the member for St Catharines how they were going to hold health care spending to $17 billion. We of course have increased health care spending to $17.8 billion in program spending alone, and we have increased total health spending to $18.5 billion. I want to move on to the changes in the membership of the committees, but I had to give this background.

We wanted to streamline government. We wanted to do more for less. One of the things we are doing is reducing the membership of the committees. What does that have to do with streamlining government? Many of the people watching today are wondering that. What it does is reduce the number of members who will be travelling.

In October 1995, we put together a motion increasing the maximum number of members to serve on committees to 14. Prior to our government coming to power, it was 11 under the previous government. What we have found since then, of course, is that committee rooms are a little bit stretched, and we find that when we travel we have monumental travelling expenses. Of course, the member for Algoma was very concerned about the fact we won't be travelling on Bill 136 and he is concerned that we are doing teleconferencing.

Mr Ron Johnson (Brantford): That's a tremendous way.

Mr Wettlaufer: Yes, it is, I say to the member for Brantford. It is a tremendous way of reaching more and more people. With teleconferencing we can reach 10 times as many people as we could possibly reach through physically travelling, plus we will be able to reduce the costs. It is far more efficient.

We also have found in our physical travelling on the committees that there have been occurrences in which reservations on planes have been made or there have been situations where we have had to reserve a big bus to transport all the members of the committee to various locations around the province —

Mr Ron Johnson: Huge expense.

Mr Wettlaufer: Yes, tremendous expense, to the member for Brantford, and what happens? We show up at the front of Queen's Park in the morning to go off on the bus and there are only the government members, or there might be one opposition member. Isn't that odd? We have committed to all that expense and the other members don't want to travel. They'll travel on their own at other expense — of taxpayers' money, I might add.

Let's not forget why we are here. We are here to serve our constituents. With the tremendous number of committee members, we are not able to properly serve our constituents if we're spending all our time in the committee. By a reduction in the number of members in the various committees, we can actually serve some of the committees with a reduced number of members and have other members able to serve their constituents. Some members will no longer have to sit on two committees. They will be able to sit on one.

In addition, we have a request from the independent member for Elgin, Peter North. He wants to serve on a committee so that he can serve his constituents by having input. This has never happened before, but under our motion the member for Elgin will be able to serve on a committee. He will have input into one committee. This makes perfect sense.

I don't know what the problem is. The people I speak to in my riding don't understand why the Liberals and the NDP are opposing this. They say: "Wayne, we want to see you more often. Don't their members want to see them?" I don't know; I really don't know if that's what's behind it. Maybe they don't want to speak to their constituents.

1650

Also, in our efforts to streamline government, to do more for less, we have committed to reducing the number of members in the House. After the next election we will have 103 members, no longer 130. That would make it a little bit difficult too for the members to serve on committees, because there will be reduced numbers.

I had a couple of other notes here; I've misplaced them. Oh, I know. One of the things I needed to talk about was other provinces. Other provinces don't have the number of members that we do. For instance, in Quebec, where they have, by the way, 125 members of the Legislature, they have 10 committees, 10 members on each committee. Very close to Quebec, in Nova Scotia they have 52 members of the government, 10 committees with nine members; New Brunswick, 48 members, and they have eight to 12 members on each of eight committees; Saskatchewan, 41 members, six committees with nine members. I don't see what the problem is. We're doing much of what other provincial governments are doing.

Some of the opposition we've had to streamlining, including length of time that one can speak and whatever — I spoke recently to the Saskatchewan Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Berny Wiens, and he could not believe the amount of time that we speak in this Legislature. He said: "Do you mean you actually allow the lead speaker from the parties to speak for an hour and a half? Heavens, we would never permit our members" — and I'm quoting him now — "to hijack the affairs of the House by speaking for such an interminable time."

Mr Bisson: Especially when it's you speaking.

Mr Wettlaufer: No, I don't speak that long, I say to the member for Cochrane South. I don't speak nearly that long. I'm a man of few words.

I just want to say that all the changes we are making under the standing orders, including this one, the number of members on committee, are designed to streamline government.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I haven't had an opportunity to speak on this resolution yet, although the previous member seems to think I had, for some reason. It deals with the committee structure in the House. The government has a way of putting forward a case which is simply not credible, a case that objective people simply will not believe.

I look at several examples of that happening. We have in committees, ordinarily, the opportunity to visit various

centres in Ontario so the people in those centres can make representations on various pieces of legislation. Normally, that is what we have done, and I think that has been very beneficial for our system of government, our democratic system.

There are people who believe that the world does not start and stop on the boundaries of Metropolitan Toronto, and I understand that. I want people to be able to have the input on legislation, because this is not legislation built of consensus, the kind of legislation I like.

The member for York-Mackenzie said I was a person who is a believer in consensus and a conciliatory approach, and he was right. Most of this legislation is not built on consensus, the way it was in the days of Bill Davis or Leslie Frost or John Robarts. This is radical and right-wing legislation, the kind you would expect to find in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and other progressive states of that kind. Therefore, we have to have adequate scrutiny by committees.

The real reason the government does not want Bill 136, the bill designed to take away rights from employees in the public sector, to go to various centres is that they're afraid of the embarrassment of the number of people who will show up in opposition. They would rather control it here where they have the security force, making it difficult and expensive for people to come from all over Ontario to Toronto. They want to control that. Therefore, we have what is called a time allocation motion, a motion designed to end debate, to terminate debate, the guillotine, if you will, on any debate on controversial legislation, so that it can be moved through expeditiously.

The contention of the government is that the opposition is not prepared to be cooperative in expediting that legislation, and the government is correct when it says that we do not want to see it whipped through the House quickly. But this afternoon, as my friend the NDP House leader, the member for Algoma, will agree, we passed a bill in a matter of a little over 20 minutes, a bill with significant ramifications for one community, Sudbury, a bill in the name of Rick Bartolucci, MPP for Sudbury, who had put forward this legislation that would allow for the election of a regional chair, a person to head regional government in the regional municipality of Sudbury. We moved through quickly on that. It was not a controversial bill. There was consensus. The government agreed, the Liberal Party agreed, the NDP agreed.

I should note in the middle of this that this is the 22nd anniversary of Bud Wildman — I won't say his real name — MPP for Algoma, so I'm going to lead the applause for him.

Applause.

Mr Bradley: Sean Conway and Bud Wildman are the only two left from the class of 1975. September 18, 1975, they were elected to the Legislative Assembly, respectively from Renfrew North and Algoma.

Mrs Boyd: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: While we're celebrating the work of two very vigorous members, I don't believe we have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Clerk, is there a quorum?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for St Catharines.

Mr Bradley: I am pleased to see more government members have joined to listen with rapt attention to my remarks in the House on the committee structure. I want to look at the issue of the government's not wanting to travel to various communities. Suddenly, they say, "We're interested in hearing people from all over Ontario so we're going to have a teleconferencing opportunity," when in reality everybody knows — if they'd be up front and say this, I think it would be acceptable only in terms of the honesty — that the government simply does not want to face the people of this province in the various communities who would come out in significant numbers to indicate their opposition to the legislation and make recommendations for its modification or withdrawal.

1700

Originally, it was the government itself that constituted these committees with a large number of members, not the opposition. The government made this proposal and the opposition accepted the proposal. What has happened now is that some of the Conservative members are getting bored sitting on the committees. They're not finding the legislation stimulating, and most of all they've found out — and I think some of the members in their heart of hearts would concede to this — that their participation in the committee, unless they are doing the bidding of the Premier, is meaningless. They are asked only to raise their hands when the chief government whip gives the order to the whip in the committee. The government members hold their hands up and vote as they are told; they speak as they're told and they don't speak when they're told. So a lot of the members in the committee are getting bored and they are saying, "Why should we sit on these committees when all we are in effect are henchmen for the government?" That is what they are told to do in committee.

I am surprised to see that they would do that, because that is why somebody would probably leave a committee. That is why somebody would say, "I am bored in the committee." The Tory members have gone to the House leader and to the whip and said, "Look, I don't want to sit around the committee and simply do what the whip told me to do, therefore I want you to shrink the size of the committee." Unfortunately, when they shrink the size of the committee they provide for fewer opposition members in the committee, and the opposition members are always eager to participate.

Mrs Boyd: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Speaking of shrinking, we have again shrunk the quorum in this place. Would you check for quorum?

The Acting Speaker: Clerk, is there a quorum?

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

Mr Bradley: I want to compliment the chief government whip, Mr Turnbull, on being able to find his mem-

bers and escort them into the House again. I appreciate his efforts. He is so busy that I think he should get a raise for performing his duties.

The performance we have to look at today is quite an amusing one. We had the good cop/bad cop performance and it was all the Premier could do not to break out laughing after rehearsing his lines. He is the tough guy who is going to stand up to workers in Ontario, but he didn't say "workers"; he said, "union bosses." He used that inflammatory description of the elected leadership of the trade union movement. I don't say, "Tory bosses." I call our Premier the Premier of the province. I don't call him the Tory boss.

Mr Klees: I have heard a few other terms.

Mr Bradley: The member for York-Mackenzie has too good a memory. I'll have to concede that to him.

After talking about how tough the government was going to be, up gets the Minister of Labour, who says, "We're going to make all these changes to the legislation." So nobody knows what to make of that. Have they one group of people out there saying: "Have they capitulated? The Premier is up there like Phineas T. Bluster of the old Howdy Doody show, blustering on." Or indeed: "Are the various amendments meaningless? So all the bravado that is expressed is meaningless." It was something to behold.

It appears that many members on the governing side, when in trouble, want to pick a fight. There are some countries which, as members will know, when they have experienced trouble start a war to distract people from the real internal problems of the country. We have in this case the Premier's advisers saying: "You know, we're down in the polls. We're getting some unpopular vibes out there. Why don't we pick a fight with somebody? Why don't we provoke a fight with somebody who might be vulnerable in terms of public opinion? Why don't we just pick on somebody out there?" Of course they have picked a fight with those who provide many services to people in this province. That is most unfortunate.

I couldn't believe that Bill Davis would do that. I don't remember Bill Davis ever doing that. Morley Kells, the member for Lakeshore, is here. He was a member of the Davis administration. I don't remember the Davis administration deliberately picking a fight with anybody. There were some disagreements that arose, but they didn't go out to pick an enemy and pick a fight, because they were built on consensus. They represented middle Ontario. They represented the significant portion of thinking in this province. But this government when in trouble is picking a fight with somebody out there and it's most unfortunate. I think problems can be resolved with the various people with whom the government has picked that fight. Those problems can be resolved. If I could see the honourable Robert Welch in this House today, he would be an individual who would find common ground with others.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: The member for Etobicoke-Humber says I shouldn't make reference to the icons of the Conservative Party, such as Bob Welch. Perhaps I should send the Hansard to Bob, because the government just appointed him to the commission which deals with video lottery terminals. I know Bob will be concerned that this government wishes to place video lottery terminals at every bar and every restaurant, on every street, in every neighbourhood, in every community in Ontario. I know Bob would be concerned about that.

Tom Wells, another moderate around here; the late Larry Grossman, another moderate; Roy McMurtry, now in the High Court of Ontario, another moderate — these were people who understood middle Ontario. They ignored the YPCs. They said: "These are people who have to get a life somehow. They should get a life." So they ignored them.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I'm glad the member for York-Mackenzie raises that case. I wasn't going to speak about this, but I will tie it into this. There was going to be a Young Progressive Conservative meeting in Brantford, as the member for York-Mackenzie reminds me. Someone invited Preston Manning, the leader of the small-c, ultra-conservative Reform Party. I think it was Mr Johnson who invited Preston Manning to speak. Then they had an argument and somebody said: "You'd better not let him speak at the regular convention. Why don't we say the convention is over and then we'll have Preston speak?" A call came in from Jean Charest and Jean Charest was unhappy. Mike Harris didn't know what to do, because he wants to support both the Conservatives and the Reform Party. As a result, it was cancelled. The YPC convention was cancelled. It had to be rescheduled for London, Ontario, the member for York-Mackenzie tells me, on October 18. I'm wondering if on October 18 Preston Manning will be available and somebody is going to invite him. Because remember — I ask you to recall this —

Mr David Turnbull (York Mills): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: It seems to me that this is quite an interesting discussion. However, it has absolutely nothing to do with the motion we're debating.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for that point of order. I think, member for St Catharines, the government whip does have a point. I would recommend you get back to the debate at hand.

Mr Bradley: Thank you. I will try to tie this back into the motion we're talking about.

I'm a bit worried about this, though. Let me tell you this. I know Mr Johnson wanted Preston Manning to come, and I understand that. He's a friend of his. But, let me warn you, the member for London South may invite Preston Manning. I understood — I could be wrong — he was cosying up to Preston Manning and the Reform Party during the federal election. I just want to forewarn some of the more progressive members of the caucus, like Ted Arnott, one of the more progressive members of the Conservative caucus, that Preston may show up in London if you're not careful.

The member beside him, Bill Murdoch, is a member of the Reform Party, aren't you, Bill? He is. He squired

Preston Manning around his riding when he was there. I've become worried. I'm going to phone Jean Charest to see what he thinks of this committee motion. Jean Charest has to be worried that some of the real right-wingers are abandoning the Conservative Party federally, with its long traditions, and going over to the Reform Party. That would worry me very much. I appreciate the member for York-Mackenzie, with his intervention, allowing me the opportunity to expand upon that particular situation facing the Conservatives.

I look forward to the future and what is going to happen. I have given examples in this House of how we have moved quickly to proceed with legislation that everybody thinks is fine and how we have taken a longer period of time and proposed amendments and made changes when we felt they were productive for the democratic system.

This committees motion does not enhance the democratic system. It limits and restricts the number of members who are members officially of committees of the Ontario Legislature. We're seeing a trend now where the government wants to hold fewer and fewer committee meetings. Yes, democracy does cost money. Some people are not happy with that. Some people who run their businesses one way say, "It's too expensive to do it that way." I don't expect them to run their businesses the way a Legislative Assembly or a Parliament is run. That's entirely different. I would not ask anybody who has a business to run it in that fashion, but I would nevertheless hope they would have a respect for a legislative body such as this.

By diminishing the number of Conservative members who can serve on a committee, and the number of Liberal members and the number of New Democrats who can serve, I don't think we enhance the operation. I don't think we contribute to democracy. I think we diminish it.

Take a look around at all the steps the unelected advisers to the Premier are suggesting to you people and you will see, in every case, that they are designed to enhance their power, the unelected whiz kids' power, and not the power of those who are elected. Whether I agree or disagree with elected members on the government side of this assembly, I want to be able to debate with them. I enjoy the opportunity to debate with them. I'm interested in what they have to say as individuals. However, all too often that opportunity is restricted by the backroom boys in the Premier's office, who don't want to see that happen. I can't debate with them. They debate with themselves and then they tell the Premier what should be done. They're not elected. They didn't have to go through what all of you had to go through to get elected.

I am speaking here on behalf of democracy. I can't help but believe that in your heart of hearts on the government side, those not in the cabinet agree with the contentions I've advanced today.

Mr Bisson: We are today probably hours away — if not in today's legislative day, possibly Monday — from passing a motion that in effect will say to the Legislative Assembly that we're going to reduce the number of members who sit on a legislative committee. To the government side, this is a good thing. They say, "If we have fewer members on a committee, it means our backbenchers don't all have to sit there and listen to the deputations of the public when they come forward to express their disfavour about bills." To the public, I would say it's probably a bad thing, because it means there is less of an ability on behalf of this Legislative Assembly, because of the diminished number of people on a committee, to be heard and to see in the final product, which is the legislation, what their comments might be. To the opposition, it creates a big problem.

We need to put this into the context of what this is really all about. That is, this government fundamentally believes that government is a bad thing. They fundamentally believe that the institutions of government, be it whatever department within the ministries, whatever service they deliver, or in many cases the institution of Parliament itself, are not necessarily a good thing.

I have the very opposite opinion of what the government says. First of all, I think government can and should play a positive role in our lives. I think it can influence many things in our economy and it can influence the betterment of how people live in our communities. I also think the Parliament, the Legislature of Ontario, can itself play a very positive role in making sure that the business the government does is done right. How is that done? One of the biggest things we do in this Legislature, other than debate bills in the House at second and third reading, is the work we do on committees.

For example, the government introduced a bill last spring called Bill 99, the Workers' Compensation Act changes. That bill went through a process in the Legislature, as most bills do in this House, where it went to a second reading debate. Members of the assembly elected from various constituencies across the province had an opportunity to have their say, based partly on their personal beliefs and partly on their political beliefs in terms of the party they belong to.

But more important, most members of this assembly, from all parties, went back to their constituencies and talked to the people who elected them. They said: "What do you think about this bill? Do you think there are good parts? Do you think there are bad parts?" Then we as elected members of this assembly say, "If you have problems with this bill or you have something to say that would make this bill better, we suggest you write to the committee as well as the minister. More important, if you have an opportunity, present your views to the legislative committee should it come to your community; if not, maybe you can travel to wherever the committee will be closest to where you live." Why? Because we as members of this assembly believe fundamentally that democracy is about giving people a voice.

That's my problem with this particular motion. The government, by way of reducing the number of people who sit on a legislative committee, is really in a lot of ways making it more difficult for people to find their voice in the legislative process. I think this government is quite

deliberate in its attempt to limit participation on the part of the public.

Just to make the point, let me give you an example of the kinds of things this government does. We have just heard today in this House that the government is tabling another time allocation motion, something I heard this party, the then third party, the Conservative Party under Mike Harris, rail against when they were in opposition. They didn't like time allocation motions; they thought they were terrible. So does every opposition party. But they're bringing in a time allocation motion on Bill 98, the Development Charges Act, when only one party has spoken to the bill. The Liberal Party has just finished doing their lead speech on the Development Charges Act third reading, and the government has come into this House and has said, "We are tabling a time allocation motion that will limit the debate on this bill," not giving an opportunity to the New Democratic Party of Ontario to have its say and, even more dastardly, taking the opportunity away from government members, especially the backbenchers, who were elected and are trying to do their jobs in their constituencies, to reflect the views of their constituents.

I'm not saying there's not a case at times where governments have to use time allocation motions. I was a member of a government that used them. Quite frankly, I had a problem using them then; even more so now in opposition. The point I'm making here is that the government in this case is not even following the process that parties normally follow when it comes to time allocation motions. In the past the process has been that the government waits for three days of debate at second reading and then tables a time allocation motion; another day of debate at time allocation motion, giving four days of debate on that particular issue. In this particular case, the government is saying, "We're going to allow the Liberal caucus one lead speaker." Then they came in and they snuck a time allocation motion on the Clerk's table.

1720

There is something wrong with the democracy of Ontario when a government of the day tables time allocations in this House that basically don't even give the opportunity for parties that are recognized in this assembly to be able to speak on them. The government might say, "It's an oversight; we didn't notice; we did something wrong." I'm tired of this government making mistakes. I'm tired of this government saying, "We didn't notice; we slipped up again."

I wish one thing that this government would do is, if they want to do their agenda, that's one thing. I may not agree with it, but you have a responsibility to manage the change in an effective manner and to do it right. But don't come into this House and then say that you believe in that process, you believe in what you're doing, you believe in democracy and table a time allocation motion, not even giving our party the opportunity to speak on it. There is a process. I think the process in this case has been very much usurped in the sense that the government is saying, "We don't even have to listen to other parties now; we don't even have to listen to our own backbenchers have their say on a particular bill." I say that's wrong.

The other good example of what this government is doing around committees is what this government is doing around Bill 136. The government is going to make changes to the Labour Relations Act that are significant when it comes to the ability of working people in this province, working in the public sector, to be able to effectively manage the change when it comes to labour relations through this downloading. If the bill is passed in its original form, they're going to take away many rights that workers in this province have been able to get by working at the bargaining table with their employers for a number of years to be able to make a better living for themselves and better working conditions.

This government is undertaking this and is saying, "We're going to ram this legislation through the House, again by use of a time allocation motion, and we're going to limit the opportunity for the public to have their say about this bill to four days of committee here in Toronto." This is after the Minister of Labour stood in this House and promised that she was going to travel that bill throughout the province and that she was going to give people ample opportunity to have their say.

I listen to the government members say, "When you were in government...the social contract...you didn't have an opportunity to go out and travel." Excuse me, I was a member of the government that went through the social contract. There were six months of negotiations, face to face between the union movement and the government of Ontario day in, day out for six months. Those people affected had the opportunity to have their say.

I listened to the Premier today. The Premier tried to stand there and say: "You have a lot of nerve, the third party, the NDP, telling us that we shouldn't have hearings when it comes to Bill 136. Look at what you did on the social contract." I'll stand the social contract against what this government does any day. I've been at union meetings across this province, the same union meetings that I went to when we were government, when there were people who were upset with the social contract. When they look at what we did and they look at what you're doing, I can tell you they're saying: "At least we understand now what the social contract was about. It was about saving $2 billion, which you did, and at the same time trying to find a way to preserve services without kicking people out on the street. If I had to vote for that today, knowing what I know now, or vote for what Harris is doing, I'd vote for the social contract any day." I'm tired of the government trying to stand up and say that the social contract was such a terrible thing.

The other point that was interesting: The third party voted for the social contract. They've got a lot of nerve. I was in this House. I sat across at the same place where they are when I looked at the then leader of the third party stand in the House and say, "We think this is a good thing." Well, excuse me. Talk about utter hypocrisy, when the leader of a party takes one position like that and all of a sudden decides it's going to be something else.

Back to the motion. The point is that the government is going to reduce the number of members who can participate on a legislative committee, and I'm saying that is a problem. One day, if you're lucky as Tory members, you just might get re-elected in this House, and if you're lucky you'll still be a party. You're going to wish the heck that you had the ability to participate on legislative committees so that you can do your job to represent your constituents, because that's why you were elected, that's why you ran and that's what you're here to do.

When the government says, "We're going to limit the number of people who can sit on a committee," on the basis of some cockamamy idea that somehow this is going to be better for democracy, I remind the members across the way that every government eventually is defeated, I think much more quickly with you guys. The polls might say you're at 30%, but I'll tell you, I've got a sneaking suspicion that come next election you're going to resemble the caucus of Brian Mulroney after the 1993 federal election.

The point I make to you is that you think you're smart now, you think this is really cute, you think you're really intelligent by changing the rules of the House to the extent you have, by changing the membership on committees; you think you're doing a great job by making the changes around how you can use closure motions. But one day you will be on this side of the House, and that's when you're going to realize what you've done.

I've learned one thing sitting on both sides, and that is that what we really need to do in this Legislature is reform the rules so they work for the people of this province, not for the politicians at Queen's Park. We need to find a way so that people can see themselves in this Legislature through their representatives and that their voice can be heard here, and it cannot be heard here with the kind of rule changes this government has made.

I suggest that one of the things we should be doing in this House is looking, through a special legislative committee or the Legislative Assembly committee, at ways we can change the rules of the House to increase the participation of individual members of both the government and the opposition in the legislative process. That doesn't mean the amount of time you have to speak or when you can speak. It's not simply that. The problem we have in this system is that 40% of the people, or in the last Parliament 38% of the people, elect a government, it gets a huge majority, and then they do what the hell they want. It doesn't matter if 60%, or 62% in some cases, of the people don't support what the government is doing; they end up doing what they want. That's regardless of the back bench of the Tory caucus, because we know who makes the decisions: the Premier and the people around the Premier's office, and that's it. The cabinet follows along, along with the rest of the Tory backbenchers.

What I say we need to do is change the way this place works so that the people themselves, the people in our constituencies, have an ability to be heard in this Legislature, so that they know when they elect their member, be it a Tory, a New Democrat or a Liberal, they're able to come into this Legislature and have some voice and some ability to affect the legislative outcomes of this particular government or any future government.

How do you do that? Primarily, in my view, in two ways. You reform the standing orders so that you increase participation of members. I'm not talking about length of speeches; I'm talking about how members could actually influence things both at the committee level and here in the House. You reform the legislative process. I've got a number of ideas I've been talking to individual members of this House about for quite some time in terms of how we change the legislative process so people have an opportunity to participate.

One idea would be that the government would table not a bill at first reading but basically call it a discussion paper, a white paper, whatever you want. It would be: "Here's what the government wants to do. Here are the goals we're trying to achieve." After that, you'd have a short debate at first reading, not just rubber-stamping it, then send it off to a committee to let people have their say about what they believe is good or bad about this particular idea, this discussion paper, and then the government could draft up its bill. That way, the government is not put in the position of having to defend the bill even though it's flawed. How many times have we seen this government draft legislation that is utterly flawed and that government backbenchers have to sit there and say, "This is good"? That's what they have to do, because they're government backbenchers. It's the same with every party, I don't care who's elected. It's a problem of this House.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): How many times did you vote against the government?

Mr Bisson: I voted against my government five times. How many times have you? I was there, you weren't.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Yes. I voted five times against my government on a number of different bills.

The point I'm making here is that because of the way the legislative process works, the minute the bill hits the House the government members have to defend it, even though it's flawed, and that's wrong. We should have an ability to have free expression by all members of the House to say: "It's a good idea, Mr Minister. You want to do something in education or whatever. Here's what we think is good. Here's what we think is bad." Backbenchers or party members or whatever you want to call them would not be in the position of having to worry about being disciplined. That's what people are upset about at home.

1730

I think one of the other things you've got to do, and my colleague Tony Silipo is one who shares this view, along with others, is that you have to change the electoral process. We need to look at what has happened in Germany and New Zealand and in a number of other modern economies where they've gone to what's called proportional representation. I think we could learn by what they've done in other particular jurisdictions about trying to find ways of balancing the power between the parties in

the Legislature so that parties start to work with themselves rather than trying to beat each other over the head.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: There's no use even listening to the guys across the way sometimes; they're really unbelievable. But anyway, the point is that you guys are changing yet again another rule of this House. In this case you're saying you're not happy by having new powers to invoke yet more closure motions; you're not happy in having new powers to be able to stifle the opposition; you're not happy enough in having new powers to be able to totally control the agenda of the House; you're not happy enough being able to pass a bill through the House in three days from beginning to end. No, that power is not quenching your appetite or your willingness to take more. You're now saying you're going to reduce the size of the committees.

I say there's a problem with that. There's a problem in the sense that you're limiting the ability of individual members to participate and to vote on matters that are important to them and their constituents. I think that's a problem. That's not a partisan view; that's my view. I would guess a lot of backbenchers in the Tory caucus and probably even some cabinet ministers would secretly admit the same if they had the opportunity.

The other thing is that by doing so, they're very much, in the end, reducing the ability that the public has when it comes to being able to participate in debate through the legislative process.

So I will vote against this particular motion for the reasons I have stated. I think it's wrong for a government to be able to do this kind of action. It's not going to serve, I believe, in the end, the constituents of the province of Ontario whom we are elected to serve. The quicker that the government figures that out, maybe the better off this government will be.

Ça a toujours été la même situation avec ce gouvernement. Ça démontre temps après temps que, quand ça vient à la question de la démocratie dans cette Assemblée, ce gouvernement retourne le dos au processus démocratique.

Ils disent, numéro un, qu'on a besoin de changer le Règlement de la Chambre parce qu'ils veulent avoir tout le pouvoir nécessaire pour être capables de passer la législation à travers cette Chambre dans trois jours.

Ils ne sont pas assez contents. Ils disent qu'ils veulent avoir la capacité de fermer par l'attribution de temps un projet de loi, en mettant une motion dans la Chambre. Ils ont changé les règlements selon leurs conditions, et là ils arrivent et ils disent que ce n'est pas assez bon.

Le gouvernement contrôle tout quand ça vient à l'Assemblée. Ils ont le pouvoir de tout arrêter et ils ont le pouvoir de passer la législation. Ils ont la capacité de fermer l'opposition quand ils veulent, et là, ils disent que ce n'est pas assez bon. Notre «candy» n'est pas assez gros ; on a besoin d'aller en chercher un autre. Puis ils disent qu'on va aller aux comités puis on va réduire le nombre de députés qui vont participer aux comités.

J'ai un problème. Le problème, c'est quand on limite l'habilité des députés de représenter leurs citoyens ou leurs citoyennes sur les comités, cela veut dire que le public a moins de chances de faire en sorte que leurs représentants sont capables de représenter ce qui est important pour les personnes de leur circonscription.

L'autre point, puis je l'ai dit tout à l'heure, c'est que ce gouvernement une bonne journée va avoir une élection. S'ils sont très chanceux, quelques-uns vont être réélus, même au troisième parti, s'ils sont bien chanceux. Eux-autres, ils vont être dans une situation, ces députés-là, les seuls qui seront réélus, de revenir à cette Assemblée et voir les règlements qu'ils ont changés.

Quand ils arriveront ici, je serai à l'autre bord de la Chambre. Ils seront assez chanceux d'être 12 ; ça va être vraiment quelque chose. Mais s'ils sont assez chanceux de revenir ici puis s'asseoir et regarder l'autre bord, et s'ils ouvrent les ordres du jour et les règlements de la Chambre et qu'ils les regardent, ils ne vont pas être contents, on va vous dire, parce qu'ils vont trouver que l'habilité des membres de l'opposition a été beaucoup réduite sous la direction du gouvernement de M. Harris. Puis une bonne journée, ils vont payer le prix eux-mêmes comme députés de cette Assemblée.

Madame la Présidente, je vous remercie pour avoir la chance de participer à ce débat.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): Now I'm really complimented because two of the three deans in the House are present, the member for St Catharines and the member for Renfrew.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): Flattery will get you everywhere, Margaret.

Mrs Marland: Actually, if anybody understands my comments, it will be the member for St Catharines and the member for Renfrew, because one of the things I really want to say is that I don't understand why we're having this protracted debate on this resolution at this time. It's very —

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Cochrane South. Come to order, member for Cochrane South.

Mrs Marland: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The very fact that I did spend 10 years in opposition, I know very well about being an opposition member in a committee as well as in this place. This resolution that is before us today is dealing with two matters. It's dealing with who sits on a committee and which committee, and also the number of people who will sit on the committee.

Surely the first matter isn't up for debate because the names of those who are appointed to committees are submitted by each caucus. Every caucus decides who they want from their caucus to sit on which legislative committee. I think we can easily set that aside.

The size of the committees is tremendously interesting. When the David Peterson Liberal government was in power — of which the member for Renfrew and the member for St Catharines were members of cabinet — I can recall that in those good old days we had 94 Liberal members in this House.

Mr Conway: It was 95.

Mrs Marland: Yes, I stand corrected. It was 95 and one became the Speaker. Correct?

Interjection.

Mrs Marland: The member for Renfrew is not helping me with this debate.

At that time, even though the government of the day had 94 members plus the Speaker, guess how many members we had on the committees? I don't know if anybody remembers but I certainly do. We actually had nine, and 10 including the Chair. The reason that I remember is that in the first two years I sat — no, actually, when you had 94 members, it was the 1987 election.

Mr Conway: Do you know how many we had before that?

Mrs Marland: Yes. In 1985 you elected 48 and the Conservatives elected 52, but what is really significant — I will try to speak to the Chair, but it's so tempting, of course, always to speak to the member for Renfrew. After the 1987 election we had in our caucus 16 members, and as I fondly like to refer to that caucus, it was myself and the 15 old boys.

Now, with that composition of 94 government members — I don't remember actually the number for the NDP, but I know there were 16 for us; I think the NDP were 19 — the committee structure then was six government members, two official opposition members and one third-party member. I know, because I sat on three committees as a single member. I did not find, of course, that it was difficult to represent the views and the opinions of the third party and I certainly never heard any complaint from the government about the problem of getting public input around this province into the government legislation that was before any of those committees.

1740

So I really fail, I guess, to understand what this debate is about and why we're questioning the current makeup of the committees, because the current makeup will now be five government members, two from the official opposition and again, one from the third party. I think the members of the current third party have just as much ability to represent the views of their party as we did to represent the number of members that we had when we had one member appointed to a committee. Speaking from my own historical perspective, I think this debate that has gone on and on is really becoming quite redundant.

There are actually advantages to the motion that is before us. One of them I think certainly is the advantage for the member for Elgin, who happens to be at the moment the only independent member in the Legislature That member is going to have a membership on a committee. It happens to be the Legislative Assembly committee, which also happens to be the committee which he has chosen. I think enhancing the role of the independent member is being very fair.

The other aspect of this resolution that we're debating of course is the fact that we have an opportunity to save money. I find it difficult to understand, frankly, why any member in this House would want to debate or talk against saving money when we're talking about the makeup and operation of committees in this place. I think that if we have an opportunity to save money in one area, all of us in this chamber, I do believe —

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Cochrane South, could you please keep your voice down? Thank you. Member for Mississauga South, continue.

Mrs Marland: I believe we all have a huge responsibility to the taxpayers in this province to save money wherever we can. We all know that when our committees travel around the province to have input and hear the opinions and concerns from constituents around the entire province, the more people we have travelling on those committees the bigger the bill we have to carry to pay for flights, buses. We don't any longer pay for meals, but we do pay for hotel accommodation. Those are big expenses. You know what's really interesting, of course, it isn't just the 14 members we currently require on committees that we pay for. We're paying for all the staff, all the committee clerk's staff, the translation staff, and we end up with very big bills and a very big expense in terms of making the public process something that's available through our public committee hearings.

I don't know how far we are along with this, but I personally hope we're going to expand on the system of teleconferencing for public hearings in committees.

Interjection.

Mrs Marland: Are you correcting me?

Interjection.

Mrs Marland: I guess it's sometimes called video conferencing, and I guess it is video conferencing that we're talking about.

In any case, it would make sense in a new age where technology is changing almost month by month that we as a Legislature keep up with those opportunities. I look forward to the committees jointly, all of the committees of the House, and all-party input into deciding —

Interjection.

Mrs Marland: Thank you, Mr Whip, it's very hard to hear.

I think if we can expand the opportunity for public input through other operational modes for our committees, then it certainly behooves us to do that.

On this bill itself, it's kind of interesting because I have sat in this House where we have debated the new standing orders and at that time, among some of the debate of the new standing orders, there was quite a lot of debate about the makeup of committees as well. So I think it's a little unfortunate that we are using time to debate something that has already been debated. I also notice that both opposition parties have taken the position that the debate on rule changes has dealt with the issue of committee size. I refer to Hansard for August 20. The member for Algoma, Mr Wildman, argued on page 11391 that the rule changes we had debated for six days did operate to reduce the size of committees.

The member for Beaches-Woodbine, Ms Lankin, speaking for her party also said that she disagreed with the rule changes but, and I am quoting from page 11392, "The

intent of the motion is to change that rule to downsize committees; in fact, in the case of the New Democratic Party, to take away representation where we have only two members on committees and limit us to only one."

I go back actually to the example I gave when I was an individual member of a committee, when we had the same number of members in this Legislature as the New Democratic Party has currently, so what we're doing here isn't unfair, it isn't unjust and it isn't something that hasn't been done before. We're not creating new waves. We're not attacking the opposition parties. We're simply saying let's be more efficient and let's try to run this place like a business. I think that's something the public feels is long overdue. When we get into bloated bureaucracies and bloated systems within our own legislative chamber and our own operation of this place, this beautiful Legislature, then we are liable to criticism, and rightly so.

The Liberal spokesman, the member for Kingston and The Islands, Mr Gerretsen, said, and I quote from page 11393: "They want, according to what was just passed, a committee with only nine members immediately. That's what's there. Those are the standing orders that we passed today, not another motion: committees with nine people."

So what is significant? This is why I referred to Hansard. Was it that the opposition parties thought the new rule changes would govern committee size? When they were debating the rule changes — by the way, a debate which lasted six days — the opposition parties thought they were debating the issue of committee size. In fact, during those six days, the opposition parties were debating the issue of committee size. So here we are again, still debating the issue of committee size.

Effectively, including today, we have already spent more than seven days of debate, starting back in June, over the issue of committee size. Remember, today's debate is over an issue that on August 20, which is actually almost a month ago now because today is September 18, the opposition parties said it was already debated and it was already decided. I guess I don't quite understand why this is continuing and why we are wasting time on a debate that has taken place, especially when we have some very vital legislation and some very important issues to the people of this province that need to come to the floor of this House to be debated in order that it can get out to public hearings in the committee process and the people of Ontario have that opportunity for public input.

The other number I came up with which I think is really quite interesting — naturally, I'm going to be defensive of my government's position, but I'd like to use facts to do that and not fiction. When I say that this government is clearly committed to consulting with the public, I'd like to place on the record that in 1996, just last year, we had 720 hours of public hearings on 33 government bills, compared with 681 hours for 40 bills in 1994 with the NDP government and, just to be fair, only 529 hours for 93 bills in 1989 in the Liberal government. I say to my friends the member for St Catharines and the member from Renfrew that you passed 93 bills in 1989, but you only spent 529 hours debating them.

Frankly, I feel we are at a point in the debate of this resolution where I really have a concern that we are just going round and round the clock. I believe this House is entitled to at least vote on whether the House feels we have had sufficient debate on this very simple, very straightforward, very technical question of committee size. Therefore, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker: Mrs Marland has moved that the question be now put.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

Those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1757 to 1827.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Johns, Helen	Parker, John L.
Baird, John R.	Johnson, Bert	Sampson, Rob
Brown, Jim	Johnson, David	Saunderson, William
Carroll, Jack	Johnson, Ron	Shea, Derwyn
Elliott, Brenda	Kells, Morley	Sheehan, Frank
Fisher, Barbara	Klees, Frank	Snobelen, John
Flaherty, Jim	Marland, Margaret	Stewart, R. Gary
Ford, Douglas B.	Munro, Julia	Tascona, Joseph N.
Galt, Doug	Murdoch, Bill	Tilson, David
Gilchrist, Steve	O'Toole, John	Turnbull, David
Hastings, John	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Hodgson, Chris	Palladini, Al	Young, Terence H.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time.

Nays

Boyd, Marion	Conway, Sean G.	Marchese, Rosario
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Silipo, Tony
Caplan, David	Lessard, Wayne	Wood, Len
Colle, Mike		

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 36; the nays are 10.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr Johnson has moved a motion for changes to the membership of the standing committees.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

Those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; a 30-minute bell.

I've just received a letter from David Turnbull, the government whip, which reads:

"Dear Mr Speaker:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I would like to request that the vote on the motion for changes to the membership be deferred until Monday, September 22, 1997."

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I

know that all the members are anxious to hear the weekly business for next week.

On Monday, September 22, we'll deal with Bill 128, Uniform Federal and Provincial Child Support Guidelines Act; on Tuesday, September 23, interim supply, and Bill 102, the Community Safety Act; on Wednesday, September 24, Bill 98, the Development Charges Act; Bill 146, the Farming and Food Production Protection Act; on Thursday, September 25, private members' public business, ballot items 99 and 100, and Bill 149, the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997 (No. 2).

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): It now being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Monday.

The House adjourned at 1832.

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Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 22 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 22 septembre 1997

The House met at 1332.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): Yesterday in my home town of Merlin, I had the opportunity to join in the annual drumhead service, which is held across the country to celebrate the beginning of Legion Week, which runs through to September 27.

Legions are a focal point in our communities across this country for the spirit of fellowship and goodwill which personifies their membership. As Canadians, it is important for us to give solemn remembrance to past Canadians who fought and died to preserve the freedom of this country. Legion activities help us to remember so that the sacrifices of so many will not be in vain.

The valuable work done by the Legion in local communities, in every hamlet, town and city in Canada, makes it the largest service club in the country, operating in almost 2,000 communities and donating an estimated $30 million to benefit individual communities. Legion members also contribute thousands of hours of volunteer service. Legion members contribute to Scouts Canada, student bursaries and awards, visitations to hospitalized veterans, and community and youth projects too numerous to mention.

The Royal Canadian Legion enjoys an outstanding record of community service, legislative progressiveness and national consciousness-raising. I am sure the entire Legislature will join me in recognizing Legion Week and in offering thanks to Legion members for their sense of commitment and dedication.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): After my nomination in April of this year, I organized a meeting of individuals who were having problems with the family support plan. There were about 30 families in attendance. All of them had accounts that were in arrears.

I've checked on those cases and I can report that almost all of those accounts are still in arrears, their regular payments are late, and these families are experiencing a great deal of financial difficulty. These families depend on this money. The money is owed to them. It helps them provide housing for their children and food and clothing.

They tell us that it's next to impossible for them to speak to anyone at the central office. When they correspond in writing, there's never any response from anyone at the plan office. Up until August 15 of this year, we had a direct line that case workers could call, but since August 18 there has been no response to any of those calls. The line goes directly to voice mail, so there isn't anyone that can be contacted at that office.

The family support plan has been renamed the Family Responsibility Office. The family support plan was put in place to support families in their efforts to receive court-ordered payments, but it appears, with this new name, that families are now being told that no one is responsible.

NIAGARA GRAPE AND WINE FESTIVAL

Mr Tom Froese (St Catharines-Brock): I want to take this opportunity to thank the Premier, Ministers Tsubouchi and Villeneuve and my Niagara caucus colleagues for visiting my riding last Friday, September 19. They took part in the celebrity kickoff breakfast for the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival at Market Square in downtown St Catharines. After the breakfast, they visited Chateau des Charmes Wines in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where they met with Dr Paul M. Bosc, president of Chateau des Charmes, and Ontario Wine Council members.

There, the Premier helped plant a transgenic grapevine, a stress-resistant vinifera vine that will revolutionize the grape and wine industry, as it can withstand up to minus 25 degrees Celsius. This scientific breakthrough is very important to all the wine-producing regions of Ontario because the industry at present accounts for more than $280 million annually in sales, and directly employs about 1,400 people. Just imagine the positive impact this stress-resistant grapevine can have on those wine sales and job creation prospects.

I want to thank everyone involved in the Grape and Wine Festival kickoff and encourage all Ontarians to visit the Niagara region over the next couple of weeks. Again, on behalf of my constituents, my thanks go to the Premier and to Ministers Tsubouchi and Villeneuve for their recognition and support.

EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): It's a sham. I rise today to again appeal to Mike Harris to rein in Dave Cooke and his commissars.

Last summer, Dave Cooke and his accomplices arrogantly dismissed the democratically elected chair of the Sudbury public education commission. The chair, Louis Bourcier, who is also the chair of the Espanola public board, was summarily dismissed, a blatant disregard of local democracy.

Now I have a letter from the North Shore Board of Education, signed by Robert Whitehead, the chair. He says in part:

"I do...feel it necessary to share my concerns with you. I must also point out that I am not the only one with these concerns. Trustees from many small boards have shared this perception with me. The role of the individual trustee in small communities, especially in northern Ontario, has become irrelevant, if not redundant.

"This may be the government's objective," Mr Whitehead says.

"...It would appear that unless the Education Improvement Commission support majority recommendations of local education improvement committees, that the process becomes a sham, especially when applied to restructuring.

"If the process is a sham," he says, "then those communities outside these larger dominant cities should be informed, especially in northern Ontario, where because of distances, meetings and travel are so costly."

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): As a former educator, I want to make some comments on matters as they relate to education. I have to tell you, ever since M. Snobelen has perpetrated a crisis in the education system, people like me have been very worried, educators across the province have been very worried, and teachers particularly, and parents, in the area of Peel have been very worried about what M. Snobelen, the Minister of Education and Training, is doing to teachers, children and the parents worried about the educational system.

We know that these folks are Tory mercenaries dedicated to cutting taxes for their rich friends. They're mercenaries. This is all about giving money away to those who don't need it, and as a result of that, they have to take money from the educational system. This is what this agenda on education is all about.

Does anybody think they have spent adequate time reflecting on educational changes that are going to improve the educational system? Absolutely not. These changes all have to do with taking money out of our school systems and that's what this is all about.

He uses reform as an excuse to bleed money from our Ontario system. These are agents of deception, and the public watching should know this. I urge the teachers who are here and watching to fight this government on the changes that are about to be announced.

1340

COURTICE COMMUNITY COMPLEX

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): It's a real pleasure to see the new pages and their fresh faces here today.

I have some good news to share from my riding of Durham East, which I am very pleased to share with the members of the House today.

An official ceremony was held September 13, 1997, to mark the opening of the new Courtice Community Complex. The $700,000 project was completed under the Canadian-Ontario infrastructure works program, with each partner — federal, provincial and municipal — contributing one third to the total cost. The funds were spent on the provision of a leisure pool, fitness centre, community hall and a brand-new library.

This project is an excellent investment in people, in community and in our future. The Canadian-Ontario infrastructure program is not about bricks and mortar; it's all about improving people's lives.

I wish to thank all the community for their contribution and congratulate Minister Marilyn Mushinski, who opened the official ceremonies; Stephanie Creighton, chair of the library board; Mayor Diane Hamre; Ian Smith, campaign chair of the Courtice Community Complex; Brad Greentree and all the hard-working volunteers; and, more important, the chief librarian of the area, Cynthia Mearns, for her hard work and commitment to bring services to the people in my riding of Durham East.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): As the House is aware, we have been chasing the Minister of Health and asking him repeatedly to release funding to Windsor-area hospitals. The response to that has been a cut, over two years, of $28 million, this at the same time as our hospitals are forced to spend over $6 million each on restructuring costs over the last two years, none of which has been rebated by the ministry.

What we found out in Windsor is that restructuring is a very costly process. I suggest to all members of this House that you will be finding out this same thing. As they are being forced to close and to merge, it is indeed an expensive process.

Because our hospitals have had to spend over $6 million each without being reimbursed by the ministry, as they should be, and as in only this last budget has money for restructuring costs been added, we unfortunately have lost hospital services before our community was prepared to accept those services in other ways.

Today's newspaper: "Mom Dies After Missed ER Diagnosis." This in a Windsor hospital leads many Windsorites to ask questions: Is this because the Minister of Health has once again failed the Windsor community, when indeed he should have come forward with funding that we identified was requested, namely, $110 million which has yet to arrive at Windsor's doorstep?

Again I ask the Minister of Health to come forward immediately.

NORTH BAY DAYS OF ACTION

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): Today marks the official kickoff of the North Bay Days of Action, and this next week promises to see many activities, many people working hard together to bring home a political point to the Premier of this province.

As I reported last week, Phil White, the owner of a North Bay deli, is honouring the protest with a special sandwich named for North Bay's MPP, Mike Harris, called the Sink Harris Sub. Another speciality on his menu is the Great Golden Banana, a frozen banana dipped in chocolate and nuts, "much like our MPP," says White.

As the activities begin, there are ordinary people bringing forth their points of view of why they are participating. For example, Trevor Knight from North Bay, a support worker at a group home for five developmentally handicapped people which was closed as a result of the Harris government cuts, says: "The Bay Days provide everyday people with an opportunity to stand up and have a voice. I will be joining thousands of people to show the Premier that by not caring or listening, his political days are numbered and we're taking back our Ontario."

Diane Gallupe from Callander says: "I'm participating in the Days of Action because I'm tired of seeing the social network that my parents and grandparents worked very hard for slip away."

People are joining together. The Days of Action are launched today. There will be activities all through this week. We invite people from across Ontario to join with us in making the political statement to Harris: "This is our Ontario. We're going to take it back."

ROBERT "JACK" HARRIS

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): I rise today in this Legislature to honour the memory of a former member of this Legislature who represented Beaches-Woodbine.

Major Robert John Harris was born September 16, 1917, in Toronto. He passed away on June 12 of this year in Toronto East General Hospital. The hospital was founded by his father, Joseph Henry Harris, in 1929.

Jack Harris was an MPP in the Beaches from 1962 to 1967. In that time he served as chief government whip. He made several noteworthy contributions to this country and province and to the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party.

He was a veteran of the Second World War. He entered the war as a lieutenant captain of the 48th Highlanders regiment, and after five years of wartime service in Italy, France, Holland and Germany, Mr Harris returned home wearing the rank of major.

He was elected to the Legislature in a by-election in 1961. After only one year in office, he returned to the polls in 1963 for a general election which he also claimed. He also served as vice-chair of the Ontario Liquor Control Board.

His service to the community was commendable. He was a director on the board of governors of Toronto East General Hospital. He was a member of the board of the Toronto East Young Men's Christian Association. He was a member of Acacia Lodge, the Royal Canadian Legion and the Scarborough Golf and Country Club.

He and his wife of 49 years, Mary, were both active members of St Aidan's and St Saviour's Anglican churches. His funeral was held at St Saviour's Anglican Church on June 14. A capacity crowd filled the church to pay tribute to a beloved member of the community. A piper from the 48th Highlanders played the lament.

Mr Harris is survived by two children, Jodie and David. He was predeceased by his son William.

He will be remembered well in East Toronto for his countless contributions to the community, and I'm honoured to recognize him in the House today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CITY OF YORK ACT, 1997

Mr Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr90, An Act respecting the City of York.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ÉDUCATION

Mr Snobelen moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size / Projet de loi 160, Loi visant à réformer le système scolaire, à protéger le financement des classes, à accroître l'obligation de rendre compte et à apporter d'autres améliorations compatibles avec la politique du gouvernement en matière de qualité de l'éducation, y compris l'amélioration du rendement des élèves et la réglementation de l'effectif des classes.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker: All those in favour please rise one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk.

1400

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Johns, Helen	Sampson, Rob
Baird, John R.	Johnson, Bert	Shea, Derwyn
Beaubien, Marcel	Johnson, David	Sheehan, Frank
Brown, Jim	Jordan, W. Leo	Skarica, Toni
Chudleigh, Ted	Klees, Frank	Snobelen, John
Cunningham, Dianne	Leach, Al	Spina, Joseph
Danford, Harry	Marland, Margaret	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Brenda	Martiniuk, Gerry	Stewart, R. Gary
Ford, Douglas B.	Maves, Bart	Tilson, David
Froese, Tom	Munro, Julia	Tsubouchi, David H.
Galt, Doug	Murdoch, Bill	Turnbull, David
Gilchrist, Steve	Mushinski, Marilyn	Vankoughnet, Bill
Grimmett, Bill	Newman, Dan	Villeneuve, Noble
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Wilson, Jim
Harnick, Charles	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Harris, Michael D.	Parker, John L.	Wood, Bob
Hodgson, Chris	Pettit, Trevor	Young, Terence H.
Hudak, Tim	Ross, Lillian	
Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Speaker: All those opposed please rise one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Morin, Gilles E.
Boyd, Marion	Hampton, Howard	North, Peter
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard
Brown, Michael A.	Kennedy, Gerard	Phillips, Gerry
Christopherson, David	Kwinter, Monte	Pouliot, Gilles
Churley, Marilyn	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Pupatello, Sandra
Cleary, John C.	Lankin, Frances	Ramsay, David
Colle, Mike	Laughren, Floyd	Sergio, Mario
Conway, Sean G.	Lessard, Wayne	Silipo, Tony
Cullen, Alex	Marchese, Rosario	Wildman, Bud
Curling, Alvin	Martin, Tony	Wood, Len
Gerretsen, John	McLeod, Lyn	
Grandmaître, Bernard	Miclash, Frank	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 55; the nays are 37.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c), the House shall meet from 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm on Tuesday, September 23, 1997, and Wednesday, September 24, 1997, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION REFORM

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): This government is committed to the goal of having the highest student achievement in Canada and providing that education in the most cost-effective way.

Ontario has not kept pace with the other provinces or countries. The Globe and Mail recently described Ontario as the caboose at the end of the education train. We're not satisfied with that position. We're working to provide our students with a strong grasp of the skills they'll need to have successful careers in today's competitive economy.

Last year, we announced our intention to move Ontario students to the head of the class. We've been meeting that commitment by introducing a clear, challenging, consistent province-wide curriculum, regular province-wide testing and a standard report card. These initiatives will ensure that students have the skills to move ahead and that parents can clearly understand how their child is progressing. We're building a new four-year secondary school program which is streamed and has a more rigorous curriculum. We have passed legislation that will reduce the number of politicians and bureaucrats and will remove waste and duplication.

Now we're taking the next step in our comprehensive plan for education. A few minutes ago, I introduced the Education Quality Improvement Act. The act is the result of months of hard work. I want to recognize the efforts of the many people who have contributed to this bill. First, the contribution of the Education Improvement Commission. Their recent report, The Road Ahead, provides insight into the importance of limiting class size and raising the level of student achievement.

Currently, school boards and unions often make agreements that increase class sizes. Parents are concerned that large classes affect their child's ability to learn. We share that concern. Under our proposals, boards would no longer be able to increase class sizes.

In their report, the EIC recommended that students would benefit from more instructional time in the school year. It makes no sense to me that Ontario students receive fewer hours of instruction than students in Switzerland, Jordan and Slovenia. We recognize that student achievement goes up when students spend more time with their teachers. The EIC indicated that although elementary teachers spend the same average number of hours in the classroom as teachers in other provinces, high school teachers do not. We believe high school teachers should be able to spend more time with their students. If this bill is passed, it would allow the government to set standards for the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom.

In addition to the EIC, I also want to recognize the fruitful discussions that we've had with parents, teachers and school boards. Their positive suggestions have helped ensure the introduction of good, effective legislation.

This bill would help to ensure a smooth transition to new school boards by improving the governance of schools, increasing parental involvement and simplifying the financing of the education system.

The bill proposes that advisory school councils would be established in every school. This would increase the opportunities for parents in the community to become more involved in the education of their children. School councils would advise principals on student discipline, student safety and on local priorities.

The bill proposes that the province would be responsible for setting all education property tax rates. We promised to cut residential education property taxes in half. Today I'm pleased to announce that we're keeping that promise. This legislation would introduce a province-wide, uniform residential education tax rate beginning in 1998. Residential education tax revenues would be cut from $5 billion to $2.5 billion and the rate would be frozen.

In this act, along with the two fair municipal finance acts, the government would make property taxes fairer and more consistent across the province. With these changes, owners of residential properties with the same assessed value would pay the same education property tax, no matter where that property is.

A uniform rate structure for residential property taxes is fair and is consistent with this government's plan to ensure that students across the province have equal access to high-quality education. It makes sense to pay tax at the same rate for a common service that benefits us all. This approach would solve the problem of spiralling education taxes. School boards would no longer need to be in the taxing business.

As I announced last Friday, the bill would not limit free collective bargaining. During the transition and after, unions and school boards will bargain freely under the provisions of the Labour Relations Act. Negotiations for a first collective agreement would begin on January 1. Existing terms would continue during the new negotiations.

The bill would allow us to set standards for quality. These standards would include the amount of instructional time, length of the school year and enhancing student access to professionals with the special expertise that they need. These are educational standards that should not be used as a bargaining chip.

We know that the best options are those in which teachers, school boards and the government work together. We've listened to their input. We've found flexibility in meeting our objectives without compromising any of them and we will work together to build a new, better, more accountable education system.

This bill is a significant step forward for our children.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): What a hypocritical piece of verbiage. This has nothing to do —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Order, member for Scarborough East. I ask the member to withdraw.

Mrs McLeod: I withdraw, but I tell you that none of this, none of it, is about educational reform and it certainly has nothing to do with "education quality improvement," to quote the name of the act. This is all about money and control and about nothing else. It is about this government and the Minister of Education wanting to control the purse-strings and make all the rules and then dump all the responsibility on to local school boards to make it work, and all the blame on to teachers and school trustees when it won't work.

It cannot work. It cannot work for students because this government has already squeezed the educational budget and Mike Harris needs even more money, at least another $1 billion for his tax cut. Boards and teachers are going to be forced to do battle to figure out how to make the minister's new rules work, when the minister has no intention of providing enough money to give this a fair chance.

We have just had a new omnibus bill for education tabled today. We cannot know yet all the details of what the minister is doing in this bill. I do know that in his statement, because this bill is at least something about collective bargaining for teachers, there is no mention that he is going to repeal Bill 100, the bill that currently governs teachers' bargaining rights. With the repeal of Bill 100 he removes the Education Relations Commission, the sole body which has ensured that students' jeopardy in the event of a strike is monitored. He's taking away all protection for students in the collective bargaining situation.

It is clear that this government is trying to avoid a province-wide fight, which the government has realized it can't win. I don't know why they wanted to pick that fight in the first place, because Mike Harris didn't need to fight at a provincial level. He can leave all the fighting to the local level and just wash his hands of the responsibility of it. That's what the Minister of Education wants to do with this bill today.

It's going to be a little tougher in education to wash their hands of responsibility, because they are going to control all of the dollars, and now they want to control class size so that they can say, "We've limited class size." The problem is they won't give the boards enough money to reduce class sizes. They're going to expect the boards to find the money by cutting somewhere else. The minister even suggests that boards and teachers have reached "agreements that increase class size" in the past. He could have taken time to get the grammar right, but I'll let that go. I do want to say that the only situations in which I have ever seen agreements reached between boards and teachers that increase class size is when they are forced to do it by government cuts and that's the only way they can save junior kindergarten or keep class sizes in grades 1 and 2 lower.

Now the boards are going to be forced to cut preparation time and see extracurriculars disappear and maybe 6,000 to 10,000 teachers' jobs so that the Minister of

Education can cut another half a billion dollars in prep time. They're going to be forced to contract out custodial and secretarial services in the hopes that part-time and temporary help will save dollars. They're going to be forced to replace guidance teachers and technology teachers and teacher-librarians and music and art and phys ed teachers with non-teachers. They'll be forced to do all this and much more because this government will set class sizes but they will not fund them.

The government may be stepping back from provincial fights, but it is creating conditions for bitter, divisive battles at the local level, battles between teachers and trustees and between parents and trustees, battles which cannot achieve anything but to hurt kids, because this province is putting all the responsibility on local boards and it is taking away all the ability to find local solutions that work for students.

The government is indeed taking over taxing property for education. They don't know yet how it's going to be done; that's one of those details for the future, like funding formulas, which we will not see for at least two months, the minister says.

1410

I think Ottawa and Metropolitan Toronto should not take much assurance from the statement that taxes are going to stay in the community, because of course the province is going to tax homes 50% less for education; they've dumped all the other services on the property tax base. But it is very unlikely that the province is going to give Toronto and Ottawa back any more dollars for education, so the students in those areas are still going to lose out by millions and millions of dollars.

This minister continues to give a distorted picture of what happens in schools. He notes that class sizes are larger than the number of teachers would indicate. How naïve can he pretend to be? He knows where those teachers are: They're in kindergarten classes and in grade 1 and 2 classes, where you have fewer students than you do in other classes; they're in technology shops and labs, supervising smaller numbers of students for safety reasons; they're in special education classes. That's where the supposedly missing classroom teachers are, and when John Snobelen takes control, they will undoubtedly disappear.

The commission said one thing that this minister has refused to answer to, and that is, "Put money back into education." Until he does that —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): It's interesting that this minister cannot ever speak about anything related to education without bad-mouthing the system. To describe Ontario's education system as "the caboose at the end of the education train" indicates the whole attitude of this minister, who has attempted to create a crisis and undermine the confidence the people of Ontario have in the education system ever since he was appointed to this portfolio.

The fact is that this government intends to take $1 billion more, over and above what it has already cut out of classroom education, despite the promise the Tories made in the last provincial election. His euphemism, "the most cost-effective way," is simply a way of the minister saying he intends to take another $1 billion out of education. However he tries to dress it up, he cannot ignore the fact that when he says school boards in this province are going to have the same sort of funding, are going to have the same sort of service and the same system of taxation for that common service across Ontario, what he's talking about is a race to the bottom in terms of quality of education in Ontario for the students of this province.

The minister tries to say he is not limiting free collective bargaining. In other words, he is saying that because he said he was going to withdraw the teachers' right to strike that they've had for over 20 years in this province, and because he was going to take principals and vice-principals out of the bargaining unit and because he was going to end the situation where members of the teaching profession must be members of the federations in order to teach, somehow he has not affected free collective bargaining.

Here's news for you, Minister: Teachers have been bargaining on behalf of the students as well as themselves for 20 years in this province and they intend to continue to do so. You cannot take the right to determine class size, to determine pupil-teacher ratio away from free collective bargaining and argue that you haven't affected free collective bargaining. You're limiting free collective bargaining through this legislation.

The minister tries to ignore the fact that teachers don't just negotiate their working conditions; they negotiate the educational conditions for the students in their classrooms. The teachers are concerned about the quality of education as it relates to the kids in their classrooms. The teachers know that a government that is determined to take $1 billion out of education is not interested in the quality of education for students in the classrooms of Ontario. The fact this government has said it can do that without affecting quality education indicates either the minister doesn't understand how education funding works in Ontario or he doesn't care. I suspect it's the latter of the two.

The minister cannot say he will make regulations with regard to the length of the school year, the length of instructional time and at the same time say he's not affecting free collective bargaining. The fact is that teachers are determined to protect their right to negotiate not only on behalf of themselves, but on behalf of the quality of education and their students in Ontario.

There is another piece of legislation before this House that is going to return the right of cottagers in cottage country to vote for school boards. After seeing this legislation, I don't understand why it makes any difference who gets to vote for school boards in this province, because school boards are completely emasculated by this legislation. On the one hand, the government is taking the money away from the school boards and, on the other hand, they are going to regulate class size. The fact is, the school boards are not going to be able to make that circle square. You can't take the money out and at the same time

protect class size. Class sizes have increased in the past when money has been taken out of education. If you take a billion dollars out and at the same time make a regulation on class size, all it is is an attack on the teachers and on the students of this province.

The government can't have it both ways. Either they're interested in protecting the quality of education, they're interested in local autonomy and local decision-making by school boards or they're interested in taking the money out. The bottom line with regard to all the moves by this government is that they are interested in taking as many tax dollars as possible out of education; they are not interested in protecting the quality of education or free collective bargaining in this province.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I'd like to take the time to introduce in the Speaker's gallery Mr Peter Nagle, member of Parliament for Auburn, Sydney, New South Wales. Welcome.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I wish to welcome the 12th group of pages to serve in this 36th Parliament:

Alexandra Ainley from Simcoe West; Cecilia Bastedo from Muskoka-Georgian Bay; Robert Bevilacqua from York Centre; Meghan Brooks from Wentworth North; Mary Jeanette Burch from Bruce; Matthew Chomyn from Etobicoke-Humber; Katherine Colucci from Mississauga South; Biko Franklin, Wilson Heights; Bradley Griffin, Hamilton West; Lee Ann Harris, York South; Christian Kimmerer, Oshawa; Nicole Lamothe, Windsor-Sandwich; Catherine MacDonald, Kingston and The Islands; Philip MacDonald, London North; Michael McLellan, Wellington; Brian Murnaghan, Willowdale; Daniel Olma, Dufferin-Peel; Krista Renaud, Grey-Owen Sound; Sarah Rice-Bredin, Port Arthur; Lisa Ventola, Halton Centre.

DEFERRED VOTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): We have a deferred vote on a motion for changes to the membership of the standing committees; a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1418 to 1423.

The Speaker: For the record, as you are seated, it's Michael McLellan from Wellington. I have a typo here, so I mispronounced it. Thank you. And if you believe there's a typo —

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hodgson, Chris	Pettit, Trevor
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Ross, Lillian
Bassett, Isabel	Johns, Helen	Runciman, Robert W.
Beaubien, Marcel	Johnson, Bert	Sampson, Rob
Brown, Jim	Johnson, David	Shea, Derwyn
Chudleigh, Ted	Jordan, W. Leo	Sheehan, Frank
Cunningham, Dianne	Kells, Morley	Skarica, Toni
Danford, Harry	Klees, Frank	Snobelen, John
Ecker, Janet	Leach, Al	Spina, Joseph
Elliott, Brenda	Marland, Margaret	Sterling, Norman W.
Eves, Ernie L.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Stewart, R. Gary
Ford, Douglas B.	Maves, Bart	Tilson, David
Froese, Tom	McLean, Allan K.	Tsubouchi, David H.
Galt, Doug	Munro, Julia	Turnbull, David
Gilchrist, Steve	Murdoch, Bill	Vankoughnet, Bill
Grimmett, Bill	Mushinski, Marilyn	Villeneuve, Noble
Guzzo, Garry J.	Newman, Dan	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	North, Peter	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hamick, Charles	O'Toole, John	Wood, Bob
Harris, Michael D.	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Young, Terence H.
Hastings, John	Parker, John L.	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	McLeod, Lyn
Boyd, Marion	Grandmaître, Bernard	Miclash, Frank
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	Morin, Gilles E.
Brown, Michael A.	Hampton, Howard	Patten, Richard
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Castrilli, Annamarie	Kennedy, Gerard	Pouliot, Gilles
Christopherson, David	Kwinter, Monte	Pupatello, Sandra
Churley, Marilyn	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Cleary, John C.	Lankin, Frances	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Laughren, Floyd	Silipo, Tony
Cullen, Alex	Lessard, Wayne	Wildman, Bud
Curling, Alvin	Marchese, Rosario	Wood, Len
Duncan, Dwight	Martin, Tony	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 62; the nays are 38.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: You will know with the rule changes that it is required that members file a written note to the Speaker at least one hour prior to when this may be brought up. I have done so. In the interests of time, I would like to read the body of my point of privilege. It's pursuant to standing order 26(c).

I believe that the time allocation motion on Bill 136 is compromising my privileges as a member of this assembly, specifically the provisions related to public hearings. According to the time allocation motion, I have only one hour of the next sessional day between the end of public hearings on Bill 136 at 5 pm, Friday, September 26, and the time required to file amendments to the legislation with the committee clerk at 10 am, Monday, September 29, to fully consider the values of the presentations at the hearings, give weight to possible amendments, have amendments drafted in legal form.

While the standing orders are silent on the specific allocation of preparation time for clause-by-clause, I submit to you that in the case of controversial and complex legislation such as Bill 136, in the absence of all-party agree-

ment, the practice, the precedent, the usage and the custom has been to allow for a reasonable period of preparation time for the filing and consideration of amendments in committee.

I respectfully request that you rule on my point of privilege and find that the time allocation motion on Bill 136 indeed infringes, in practice, in precedent, in usage and in custom, on my privilege as a member of this assembly in being able to carry out my duties.

1430

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I would like to add the concerns of our caucus in the same matter. Not only is it impractical to expect that amendments can be concluded in such a short period of time, but without having the actual amendments to Bill 136, which the minister has announced are going to cause a major rewriting of the bill, how do we know what amendments we are offering to an amended bill when we haven't seen their amendments? The whole time allocation motion very much denies our rights, as members of this House in opposition, to provide effective, considered, responsible, credible opposition to the government when (a) we don't have the time to do the job and (b) we don't have the information.

If I can, I would also say that today the subcommittee meets. The hearings are supposed to start tomorrow. The advertising has not started. How does anybody even know when they're going to speak this week since there is no preparation time and, again, what is it they speak to when they make a submission when we haven't seen the government's amendments?

This is a very serious matter, Speaker, and I would urge you on behalf of both opposition parties to give it as much consideration as you can.

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): This is just a normal process. The time allocation motion that's been put forward —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order.

Hon David Johnson: The motion put forward specifies four days of public hearings.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): What on?

Mr Christopherson: What on?

Hon David Johnson: On Bill 136.

The Speaker: Order. Members of the opposition, I ask you to come to order. I listened to your points of order. With respect, the government didn't heckle. I ask you to do the same.

Hon David Johnson: Clearly, many members will speak to the bill. They can speak to the amendments they wish to put forward. There is no difference in this particular committee from any other committee. There have been extensive consultations that have taken place over quite a period of time through the Ministry of Labour with various interest groups. These public hearings will be an extension of that.

All parties will be represented on this committee. They have four days, which is four days more than we had during the social contract period, I might add for the benefit of the third party. There is a weekend period between the final day of the public hearings and the clause-by-clause. There is the ability over that weekend period to consider any amendments that are coming out of the process in the clause-by-clause period, two days of clause-by-clause.

There is nothing unusual about this. Indeed, this is the kind of process this House has undertaken with many other bills and I don't think there are any particular grounds to rule this out of order.

Mr Patten: The government House leader knows full well that this is not a normal procedure. I contend that only in cases in which you had all-party agreement would you have such a short period of time in which to consider, draft and submit your amendments. When the House leader says that this is normal, that this is procedure, this is the procedure according to the new day and the new thinking of this government and their rule changes, to try to not allow members to fulfil their duties and responsibilities in the most adequate way possible. In this particular instance it does not provide an opportunity to do such.

Mr Christopherson: I will be very brief. The government House leader speaks to the issue of consultation and the fact that they had consultation. You, Speaker, and the rest of this House and the whole province know that there was absolutely no consultation with the labour movement when they brought in Bill 136 — none whatsoever. The issue for us on privilege — and of course we had the political debate around the time allocation and how we felt about that, but this very much is a matter of privilege, given the fact that these are not normal circumstances, and the government House leader knows that.

His minister, the member sitting right beside him, stood up last week and announced a major gutting and rewriting of Bill 136 but has still not provided the written amendments. What exactly are we expecting people to comment on next week, and how are we supposed to consider input, such as it is, at 4:59 on Friday, when from 5 o'clock until Monday morning at 10 is the only time we have to make the amendments? I would point out that that afternoon we begin debating on those amendments.

Speaker, with regard to the time allocation motion, our privileges as members have definitely been breached and we would ask you and implore you to look at the fact that the announcement last week changed the ball game significantly from any other we've ever experienced in the history of this province.

Hon David Johnson: There's no basis on which announcements of amendments that the government is prepared in a general sense to consider would affect the flow of the committee activity.

The public is invited to come and reflect upon the bill, to give their views on the bill and how the bill would work. There's no difference in this. Because certain amendments were suggested in a general context does not take away from the ability of the deputants to come and speak to the bill and to what they would like to see in the bill.

The Speaker: I want to thank the members who made their positions known, the members for Hamilton Centre, Ottawa Centre and the government House leader. I thank the member for Ottawa Centre for submitting the motion in the proper form before the House today.

Let me just say first off that this time allocation motion is by its nature a time allocation motion, meaning that certain privileges and rights that we expect under normal procedures in fact suffer. There would not be any need for a time allocation or a guillotine motion if the government at the time didn't in fact decide this is what needed to be done to push through whatever piece of legislation they were dealing with.

The argument that you're making, that you are suffering personally because of that time allocation motion, may be a very valid argument, but by its very nature that's what happens when governments introduce time allocation motions. That's what fundamentally is designed to happen. You're dealing with a bill rather more quickly, considerably quicker, than you would in any other normal way. In fact, Erskine May, in the 21st edition, speaks to it very clearly on page 408:

"Allocation of time orders," or guillotine motions

"In many sessions in order to secure the passage of particularly important and controversial legislation, governments have been confronted with the choice, unless special powers are taken, of cutting down their normal program to an undesirable extent, or of prolonging the sittings of Parliament, or else of acknowledging the impotence of the majority of the House in the face of the resistance of the minority. In such circumstances resort is had sooner or later to the most drastic method of curtailing debate known to procedure, namely, the setting of a date by which a committee must report, or the allocation of a specified number of days to the various stages of a bill and of limited amounts of time to particular portions of a bill. Orders made under this procedure are known as 'allocation of time' orders, and colloquially as 'guillotine' motions. They may be regarded as the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities of the House, and it cannot be denied that they are capable of being used in such a way as to upset the balance, generally so carefully preserved, between the claims of business and the rights of debate. But the harshness of this procedure is to some extent mitigated either by consultations between the party leaders or in the business committee in order to establish the greatest possible measure of agreement as to the most satisfactory disposal of the time available."

The bottom line is simply, yes, you're right, but time allocations are designed to do just that. I don't find that there is any privilege that's been usurped here.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): My question is for the Minister of Education. A parent came into my constituency office on Friday afternoon with his 12-year-old daughter. He wanted her to tell me about her class at McKellar Park school. She's in a split grade 6-grade 7 class with 31 students. It's actually the smallest intermediate class in that school. They have exactly seven mathematics texts for these 31 students. The photocopying budget has been cut by 20% again this year and the teacher is buying pencils for the students out of his own pocket.

Minister, you're about to take control of both the financing of education and the setting of class sizes. Will you provide enough money to lower class sizes and provide textbooks for every student, or will you expect local school boards to cut teachers' salaries and contract out school maintenance and use non-teachers in the classrooms so they can find the money to meet your new rules?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): The references that the member for Fort William makes today to a lack of classroom supplies in some cases, to large class sizes, are exactly the reason why we made a commitment some months ago to take over responsibility for the funding of education, to make sure every student in Ontario, no matter where they are, has the opportunity for a first-quality education. That's the reason we've lifted that burden from school boards and taken it on as a province. The bill I put forward today would allow us to advance on that, would allow us to make sure that we have control of class sizes for the very first time in this province. I think it's a step forward for the students of Ontario.

1440

Mrs McLeod: I'm sure we know — perhaps you don't, Minister — that nothing you have done today is about educational reform or about bettering education for students. It is all about money. So I want to talk to you about money and I want to talk to you about students.

Your cuts have already forced boards to shut down junior kindergarten programs. Your cuts have already devastated adult education. Your cuts have forced cuts to special education and library services and physical education and guidance and music. Your cuts have already meant teacher layoffs and larger class sizes and fewer courses for secondary school students to choose from.

Minister, you cannot fix any of this unless you give school boards the money to fix it with. You are going to make all the rules. You are going to control all the dollars. You are going to dump all the blame for what happens on the local school board. Will you at least give back the money you have stolen from education and guarantee there will be no more cuts?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The member for Fort William will know that there has been a tradition, there has been a

problem with spiralling education property taxes across the province. I don't think that's any —

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): It's all right to steal, but not to lie.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The member for Lake Nipigon, you must withdraw that comment. It's out of order.

Mr Pouliot: All I said, Speaker, is that it was all right to steal, but not to lie.

The Speaker: I don't need an explanation.

Mr Pouliot: I will withdraw it.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Minister.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I know it won't be any news to the constituents in the member's riding that there have been spiralling education costs on the property taxes. The bill we've put forward today would allow this government to take responsibility for funding. We've said we're committed to making sure that there are sufficient funds available for every student in the province of Ontario. We intend to be held to account for that promise. We will be. We have experts working with us to make sure that happens.

We just put a bill in the House that will end spiralling property taxes for education, that will end spiralling class sizes, which is the other way that education has been deteriorating in the province. It will end both of those things, and the member for Fort William just voted against its introduction. I don't understand that.

Mrs McLeod: Where education taxes have been raised, they have been raised to make up for this government's cuts and to try to protect their board's ability to meet the needs of students. Minister, you talk about equity, you talk about funding formulas that will meet the needs of students, but you're not going to show us the funding formulas for at least two months. People look at what you have done and nobody believes you when you talk about fairness for students.

The Lakehead Board of Education has looked at what it will cost to extend the school year, one of your promises. It will be an extra $274,000. They don't think you're likely going to pay for that with some new money. They've looked at your funding formula proposals for special education and they fear they are going to lose half of what they now spend to meet the needs of their special needs students. They've looked at your proposals for plant maintenance funding and they come up as much as $3 million short.

Minister, boards are looking at this and they are afraid of what you are about to do to them and to their students; teachers are afraid of what you are going to do to them and to their students; and parents are afraid of what you are going to do to their children. Will you get past meaningless words and arbitrary formulas and show us where the money is, Minister?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I can show you clearly where the money has been going in education over the course of the last decade. I think the member for Fort William should know that. I believe we've had a number of studies done in Ontario that have suggested doing what we are doing in this bill, which is having the province take responsibility for making sure the funds are there for our children in their classrooms. We will do that. In order to do that, we have sent out some expert panels who will be reporting to us very soon, who will help us set the perimeters for a first-quality education and who will help us make sure the funds are there for our students.

Unlike the member opposite and her government, we do not measure our success by how much we spend. We measure our success by how well our students are doing, and that's where the member will see the improvement.

HOME CARE

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): My question is for the Premier. I'm here to talk to you about one of the people who doesn't seem to quite fit into Mike Harris's Ontario. Her name is Stella Matthews. She's 81 years old, she lives in the Cambridge area and she is being looked after by her daughter, Gail Jones, and her son-in-law, Alan Jones, who is here in the gallery watching. They provide 24-hour care. But Premier, since May they have been threatened with the loss of the little bit, the four to five hours of nursing care or homemaker care they get. They are being threatened with the loss of that, and it will happen on Thursday unless somebody in your government is accountable.

Premier, we wish for you to be accountable. I'm sending across to you a picture of Ms Matthews to show you the circumstances. She is being cared for at home in an advanced state of multiple sclerosis —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Question, please.

Mr Kennedy: — with machines that clear her throat, that feed her, but the family cannot do this alone. Will you undertake today to guarantee they will get an answer from the Ministry of Health and from your government today —

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think the Minister of Health should respond directly to this.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I thank the honourable member for the question. I know it's a follow-up to the correspondence he sent to me earlier.

My understanding of the case is twofold. One is that the community care access centre is continuing to provide services, and there is an appeal pending before the Health Services Appeal Board. That's all I can say at this point, except that we are encouraging the community care access centre to continue to provide the services to this individual.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, you should be aware that tomorrow lawyers that you've hired for the community care access centre, private sector lawyers for your ministry, are going to go in to argue that Stella Matthews, who's 81 years old and bedridden, can't be heard at that appeal. So your staff have waited until the nth hour and they've made submissions. Mike McDonald, who's a pro bono lawyer for the family — we don't know what would happen if this

family had to hire a lawyer — is here today. He has to go in tomorrow and argue against your ministry just for the right to be heard.

You didn't promulgate sections 72 and 73 of the Long-Term Care Act. It's a very good likelihood that this Health Services Appeal Board won't hear Stella Matthews's case tomorrow and she will lose her care on Thursday.

Minister, it is the height of irresponsibility to put a family providing this intense level of care through this kind of anxiety and stress and grief. Will you end it? Will you do something about mediation, about some other solution? Will you promise to do it today?

Hon Mr Wilson: The honourable member knows I can't comment further on this rather complicated case, that it is before the Health Services Appeal Board, which is a quasi-judicial tribunal. We have to respect that process.

Mr Kennedy: It is important for the whole province, because Stella Matthews is one of what will be many people who will no longer stay in hospitals because this government tells them to leave quicker and sicker, who have been told in rosy language that home care, all kinds of advanced care, will be available for them.

What you did was cut their care from 35 hours down to 19 hours and help create conditions that have led to the situation today where their care is going to be lost altogether. Will you at least inquire into the conditions of where home care is being cut, where this family will lose their care once the Health Services Appeal Board tells them they can't hear it tomorrow?

Minister, you're the only person they can go to. If you don't stand up today and say you'll take some responsibility, then on Thursday this family, and this gentleman here, who says he provides 24-hour care, that his wife sleeps beside his mother because they don't get enough help, that she's got sleep deprivation because they don't have enough care from the government —

The Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Kennedy: This gentleman says his mother-in-law is at risk because of the government. Will you tell him he's wrong?

Hon Mr Wilson: The government didn't take any of the decisions in this case to date. We've increased home care. The case is a little more complicated than the honourable member lets on. Let me just tell you that if the appeal isn't dealt with tomorrow, we will look at the case. Of course we'll look at the case and of course the ministry is involved.

Mr Kennedy: Why wait?

Hon Mr Wilson: "Why wait?" the honourable member says. Because I respect the quasi-judicial process. There is nothing I can do — and you know that, Mr Kennedy — while this is before the Health Services Appeal Board.

1450

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question to the Minister of Education. There is one question bothering everyone in this province who is concerned about education. That question is, how much more money is the Harris Conservative government going to cut from our children's education?

Minister, you've assumed complete control over education funding, and we understand that your ministry officials have been shopping around possible funding models. My question to you is this: Is it true that the funding model you are now working on would cut the education budgets of every board of education in the province except for the poorest 15? Is that the model you're looking at?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): To the leader of the third party, I want to be very clear that we have made a promise, and that promise is to meet the needs of every student in the province of Ontario for a high-quality education. The reason we are addressing the funding of education in this bill that we introduced today is because we know that the funding formula that currently exists, the general legislative grant programs, makes second-class students of some of our young people in Ontario, and that's not all right with this government. That's why we are working very hard to make sure we can do that, to assure every student in Ontario a high quality of education, because every student in the province is important to us.

Mr Hampton: I asked the minister a very specific question, one that I thought it would be easy for him to answer. I didn't get an answer. What I got was a dance, so let me try again.

Minister, you've said over and over again that you intend to cut a further $1 billion from our children's education in this province. You've said it on several occasions; it's been reported on several occasions. The legislation being introduced today will give you the tools to make those cuts. It's clear that's what it's all about.

The question is, when are you going to tell people how much more money you're going to take from their children's education? When are you going to release your funding model? Answer my question. Is it true that you're working on a model that will cut every board except for the poorest 15?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The leader of the third party is wrong. We have made a very clear public promise. I'll say it again: We'll meet the education needs of every student in Ontario. We'll make sure they get a high quality of education. We'll make sure they don't get the mediocre education that your government left them. We'll make sure that changes.

But let me tell you this: On the funding of education, we have got the expert panels which will be reporting to me in the very near future. When the expert panels have reported, we'll go out and make sure that their recommendations work in the real world on a board-by-board, school-by-school basis. We'll make sure it's right. Then the province will assume the responsibility for education so that we can make sure every student in the province has a high quality of education.

Your speculation is just that, sir; it is speculation. We are going to let the experts tell us what it takes to make sure every student in this province has a good education.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): The minister's confidence in experts is quite scary.

The minister has said today that he intends to set regulations to limit class size, which many people in the province would welcome, but at the same time he is going to continue the cuts and take another $1 billion out of education, thus removing almost all of the flexibility for school boards, particularly because he, the minister, will be setting the mill rate and determining the taxation. Boards will no longer have any financial flexibility.

Surely the minister understands that limiting class sizes means that many school boards will need more classroom space and many will need more teachers, particularly at the elementary level. Does the minister intend to increase funding for capital construction and to hire more teachers for school boards so that the funding will be adequate to meet the needs of current and future enrolment in Ontario?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The member for Algoma is quite right when he says that the bill I've introduced today would have the effect of limiting flexibility. Flexibility in increasing property taxes, yes, it will certainly limit that; we'll put a cap on that.

It will also limit flexibility in terms of increasing school class sizes so that we can't have what happened under your government, sir, where we had a 7% increase in class sizes across the province in response to your social contract. Yes, we'll take that flexibility out so that we can't have ever-increasing class sizes, so we can't have the results like in Metro separate, where JK went from 18 to 21, grades 1 and 2 went from 23 to 25, grade 3 went from 28 to 31 and grades 4 to 8 went from 32 to 35 as a result of the negotiations.

Yes, we'll reduce that flexibility, but we'll provide lots of flexibility to get our students to the top of the class in terms of their performance.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question to the Premier. A whole bunch of people across Ontario, both public sector workers and public sector employers, are wondering now what public sector labour law will look like since your Minister of Labour announced that she is gutting Bill 136.

Here is the situation, Premier: You brought in time allocation, which shuts off debate, the hearings start tomorrow, but no one has seen the amendments, so no one now knows what is in Bill 136. This is a very strange way to deal with important legislation, legislation that is critical to our public services.

Premier, don't you think that public sector workers and public sector employers and the people of Ontario deserve to see what is in your public sector labour law before they go to public hearings and try to talk about it?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I know the Minister of Labour can respond.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): As you know, we have been engaged in consultations now throughout the course of the summer and we announced changes on Thursday last week which reflected the fact that we had listened and consulted and we were prepared to make the changes and announce them at this time. In the course of the weekend we have continued to meet with all the major stakeholders and we have shared with them the details. In fact, those meetings are continuing now. In some cases we will be meeting with those stakeholders a second time in order that they understand the details. All of it has been prepared and the amendments will be ready next week. We have all this week for the people in Ontario to respond to the changes we've made.

Mr Hampton: This is the most absurd situation I have ever seen in the 10 years I've been around this Legislature. The government brings in time allocation —

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: Premier, if you want to answer the questions, you can, all right?

The government brings in time allocation, shuts off debate, then the minister stands up and says, "We're going to gut the bill." Now hospital executives, hospital boards, don't know what the labour law is going to be for the public sector. Municipalities don't know what the labour law is going to be for the public sector. Workers don't know what it's going to be. Unions don't know what it's going to be. The minister says there are amendments but she won't show them to anyone. It's as if she's got to hide them away.

Minister, this is absurd. If you want people to be able to contribute to Ontario, show them your amendments so people can see what the proposed law is going to be and then hold the public hearings. At least have that much respect for democracy.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think the member is somewhat in error when he comments about the amendments. We indicated last week that we are prepared to make changes to the legislation. Tomorrow we will publicly share again with the members of the committee the details of those changes, just as we're doing as we meet now with AMO, with the hospital association, with the OFL, with the police. In fact, we have already indicated to you, unlike what you used to do, the direction we're headed and we are giving people an opportunity to respond to the changes we're making. They have all week.

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The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): Minister, you can appreciate how we might feel about what you say in this place and what you do, given what you did to your promise about travelling around the province and listening to everyone who deserved to be heard.

The majority on the subcommittee of the resources development committee are not buying what you're saying either. They know there is a need to hear the amendments before we have any kind of public input. That committee recommendation goes to the full committee today. Since it's your government backbenchers who form the majority on the committee, will you stand today and urge those government backbenchers to support the subcommittee's recommendation that you indeed table those amendments before the hearings to try to save some shred of credibility, of whatever is left of your reputation in this matter?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would indicate to you that unlike your government, which had not one day of public hearings on the social contract and which passed the social contract in about three weeks, we have been consulting since July on the bill. In fact, we have even moved forward and indicated to you the changes we're prepared to make and you now have an opportunity to respond to the changes we're proposing.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just conclude by indicating that I know it's a surprise to the NDP that we have done exactly as we said we would do, and that was to listen, to consult and then to bring forward changes.

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: You broke your promise. You couldn't tell the truth if your life depended on it.

The Speaker: Member for Hamilton Centre, I ask that you withdraw that comment. That's unparliamentary.

Mr Christopherson: Speaker, she did not tell the truth.

The Speaker: I give you one more opportunity to withdraw it, member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr Christopherson: With great respect, I cannot do that.

The Speaker: I name the member for Hamilton Centre, Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: Minister?

Hon Mrs Witmer: This week there's an opportunity for public discussion on the changes we introduced last week, and tomorrow afternoon I will be sharing with the committee further detail on those changes.

VIDEO LOTTERY TERMINALS

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a question for the Premier. It has become apparent today that the report from CISO, the Criminal Intelligence Service of Ontario, is becoming increasingly public. Indeed its contents were the subject of the lead story in the Windsor Star today, which of course headlines the criminal element involved.

You have recently announced 44 permanent casinos, the majority of which will operate year-round, 24 hours a day, and which will contain up to 6,600 video lottery terminals in total, electronic slot machines that are the most alluring and most addictive form of gambling.

The criminal intelligence report states: "Legalized gambling has never replaced illegal gambling. In fact it compliments it. Experts indicate that the introduction of new legal games brings in new players, a significant number of which yield to the lure of illegal gambling activities to satisfy their interests."

Premier, in view of the contents of this report, in view of all the problems that are arising, will you agree to place a moratorium on the spread of video slot machines by keeping them out of the 44 permanent charity casinos and bars and restaurants in Ontario?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I know the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations will answer that.

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I have made inquiries and I have been advised that it is not a CISO document. I haven't seen the report, obviously, but I will say this. There are a couple of indications in the news report of what the concern is. Certainly one part of that is the concern about the poor regulation that has taken place in the bingo industry.

This is a follow-up, I believe, on the CISO report of last year in which certain concerns were addressed and indicated. I am pleased to tell you that despite how poorly the bingo industry had been regulated by prior governments, as of October 1, 1996, the commercial bingo halls have now had to comply with stringent standards regarding internal controls, tracking of paper and audit requirements.

I will also indicate to you that the report from last year, because that was a concern, the member for St Catharines certainly raised it, indicated there was a concern at that point in time about bingo halls, break-open tickets and Monte Carlo nights. It was particularly critical of security at Monte Carlo nights. This is the reason why we're moving to permanent charity gaming clubs.

Mr Bradley: I don't recall mentioning bingos or anything else. I recall video lottery terminals or electronic slot machines, which are the most addictive and alluring form of gambling that we have in the province, and the spread of them to 44 permanent casinos around the province and ultimately to bars and restaurants in Ontario.

Minister, will you assure the House on behalf of the Premier, since the Premier would not, despite what he said during the last election campaign, that this government will never allow the placement of video lottery terminals in bars and restaurants in the neighbourhoods of the towns and villages and cities of Ontario, and will you ensure that those illegal machines which may be in existence today are taken out of existence by the policing of members of the police forces across Ontario?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: We have indicated already that we are looking at video lottery terminals with respect to the racing industry and race tracks and also with respect to charity gaming clubs.

The member seems to be concerned about illegal gaming, as we all are, as I am. I certainly applaud his raising this point. We are a government that believes in providing

tools to combat illegal gaming in this province. We have indicated already that we're going to be dedicating about $7 million for additional resources to combat illegal video lotteries and other illegal gambling in this province. This is an increase of the OPP's illegal gaming unit from six officers under prior governments up to 35. We're seconding about eight officers from Metro and we have special prosecutors to make sure we carry through. In addition to that, we have increased the complement of enforcement officers on staff to eight.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Just to give you an indication, quickly, in 1993 only three charges were laid by the NDP government's —

The Speaker: Thank you very much. New question.

HOSPITAL BEDS

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): My question is to the Minister of Health. Last Friday, I issued a press release exposing the critical shortage of intensive care unit beds in the city of London. All of last week and continuing over the weekend, I understand, there were no intensive care unit beds available at either hospital. Of course, we know that means staffed beds, not the actual bed itself but beds that are staffed by the professionals who care for the patients. When this kind of problem occurs it means that major surgeries have to be cancelled, that there is no capacity to deal with accidents, that patients who are too fragile to be transported have to be looked after in emergency rooms or recovery rooms.

The doctors, nurses and hospital officials in London, who are cooperating fully with you on your restructuring plan, are begging you to begin to reinvest some resources into the critical care units in London to enable them to ensure that critical care is not jeopardized while restructuring goes on. Yet your member for London South says bad news is good, that the crunch indicates your plan is working. Minister, do you agree with the member for London South?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I think my colleague from London South was pointing out that the NDP cut ICU beds during their time in office by 30% in London. We've not cut one ICU bed in our almost two and a half years in office. You should have put out the press release when you were in office and cut 30% of the ICU beds.

Having said that, the good news that my honourable colleague was pointing out is that the commission is ordering that we go from the current low level of beds and bring back some of the beds that the NDP government cut. They're suggesting we go to 75 or, as indicated in a letter today from Mr Dagnone, the CEO of the London Health Sciences Centre, we probably should go from 75 to 80 ICU beds. We'll be encouraging London to do exactly that.

1510

Mrs Boyd: Minister, you encourage all you like. Does that mean you're going to fund those beds? Does that mean you're going to end some of the cuts that you've made to funding? Hundreds of millions of dollars have come out of those hospitals and you say you're going to encourage them? Encourage them with the money.

Let's listen to what these doctors and nurses say. First of all, Janet Robertson, a 30-year operating room nurse: "I am sick and tired of hearing that patient care is not suffering. I'm seeing very sick people suffering because of the funding cutbacks."

The head of surgery at St Joseph's said that unless funds are made available for staffing additional ICU beds, the whole system is in danger.

Mr Dagnone, whom you just quoted, said, "This is the toughest year I have ever seen in health care." He also said:

"We are having serious difficulties in finding that next bed for that next emergency patient.... We do not have the capacity to meet the demand that is out there.... We are putting a lot of volume through and putting it through with fewer resources."

How long is this going to go on? You try and put the blame on other people. You've been the minister for a year and a half. When are you going to take responsibility?

Hon Mr Wilson: I was astounded that the member who cut the beds had the gall over the weekend to put out a press release blaming this government, that has not cut ICU beds. That credit goes to the London Health Sciences Centre.

Yes, there is pressure on ICU beds because they're getting more referrals. When Mr Dagnone is talking about never seeing a year like it, he's getting more referrals from the outlying areas, and because of our $35-million investment in cardiac care, London Health Sciences Centre has been asked to do an extra 200 cardiac surgeries. He points out in his remarks to you, to the media and to me that those 200 surgeries all eventually have to go through ICU and it's putting pressure on the beds.

The commission is recognizing that pressure. It's asking the government to fund more beds, to restore the beds the NDP cut, and we're going to do that.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): My question is to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Minister, I know your ministry is moving towards self-management of a number of business sectors that your ministry currently regulates. I support these measures and encourage you in that. In fact, I sat on the justice committee for Bill 54, the Safety and Consumer Statutes Administration Act, and I know it's part of your ministry business plan.

On behalf of the travel agents in particular from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Wainfleet, my question today is, what progress has the ministry made towards the smooth transition to self-management and how are you ensuring that consumers are protected in this process?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): The government clearly indicated our intention in Bill 54 to move towards industry self-management in industries that were felt to be mature. This would include certain functions such as administration, licensing and some of the enforcement functions.

We will ensure that the consumer is protected because we're talking about self-management and not about self-regulation. The government still retains our regulatory functions to set standards and monitor the performance of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario. TICO started operations on June 25, 1997, and also manages the travel industry compensation fund.

To ensure a seamless transition to the new self-managed, non-profit organization, MCCR will supply staff and technical support for the first six months. Our ministry will maintain responsibility for consumer protection since the consumer legislation and regulations will still fall under our responsibility. We also have indicated we will have government representation but also consumer representation on these councils.

I would like to take this time to quickly applaud —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): You'll have to do that in the supplementary.

Mr Hudak: I'm pleased to hear there's success emanating from Bill 54. I'm also pleased to hear that you'll still maintain representation on the board.

The other side of the coin is, how can we maintain consumer protection? What steps can the ministry take to make sure that the interests of consumers are satisfied?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: As I indicated earlier on, part of what we're trying to do to ensure that the consumer is protected in Ontario is that we have a government ministry official who has been appointed to the board by the name of Sue Corke. Second, we have a couple of representatives from consumers, one of whom is Lillian Morgenthau, who represents the Canadian Association of Retired Persons.

I'd like to emphasize that what we're doing here is self-management, not self-regulation. We will continue to regulate and monitor the industries. We have the right, of course, to appoint members to sit on these industries. We have the right to require annual reports and reporting back on individual cases. Certainly the important thing to remember here is that we will maintain the regulatory function.

Since June 25, TICO has laid charges under the Travel Industry Act. They have taken some steps such as suspending travel agents' registrations, and they have conducted a number of investigations.

HOME CARE

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I want to go back to the Minister of Health with regard to the situation of Stella Matthews. You said you had to wait for the Health Services Appeal Board. You're aware that the Health Services Appeal Board cannot hear — at least in a number of cases in the past they have actually decided they cannot hear appeals on long-term care.

If the Health Services Appeal Board tomorrow says they can't hear Stella Matthews's case, she will be left without care come Thursday. Why are you sending expensive lawyers in to prepare briefs, to prepare cases — we understand there are two sets of them, for your ministry and for the community access centre — when you know in advance that Ms Matthews will be turned down on a technicality of your government's making? You have not made that board available to hear appeals on home care. Will you stand up today, perhaps with this new information, and perhaps change the way you can respond to this as a result? The Matthews family would much appreciate it.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): The honourable member is making it sound like the family is not receiving care now. My understanding from the community care access centre directly is that they are continuing to provide the home care while this very complex matter is being dealt with before the appeal board. I have never heard, except for the allegation made today during his press conference in his office at 1 o'clock, that the family is going to be cut off come next Thursday or whenever.

Our assurance is the community care access centre will continue to provide care, and they all have a right to appear before the Health Services Appeal Board. We have to respect that process. I don't know what the outcome will be tomorrow. I don't even know whether it will all be solved tomorrow. It's just that we're going to try to keep providing care and see what the appeal board says. That's the best I can tell the honourable member at this point.

Mr Kennedy: I spoke to the people in your ministry. They directed that care would continue only until Thursday — your ministry, not the community care centre. Both your ministry and the community care centre are arguing tomorrow in this quasi-judicial court that Stella Matthews cannot be heard. They've got her running around in a loop that doesn't end — except on Thursday. They have said conclusively they will not provide care beyond September 25.

At least today, if you, like many of us here, disagree that they should be pushed to the precipice like this, to not know whether that care will be there on Thursday, will you agree to ensure that that care is there for the foreseeable future until this family can get the care and the attention it deserves?

Hon Mr Wilson: I cannot comment further on this case.

1520

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I have a question for the Attorney General with respect to his mismanaged family support plan. It has been over a year since the regional office closed in Windsor with respect to the family support plan. Women who are owed support can't get through to the 1-800 line. Their faxes and their letters go unresponded to, and they don't get the cheques because they are either lost or delayed.

I want to tell you about Sharon Stockford. She lives in Windsor. She has been receiving money from the plan since 1990, and she had never had any problems until January of this year, after the regional office was closed. She has been trying to find someone to listen to her since June of this year, to inform them that one of her children is no longer residing at home. She recognizes that the payor is paying too much and that she is not entitled to the money. She is worried that she is going to be penalized later on.

Regular payments have been bungled since January, and she knows that this is going to complicate her payment schedule. When are you going to start listening to women like Sharon? When are you going to clean up this mess? When are you going to take steps to ensure that women can be heard and their problems dealt with?

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I appreciate the question, because I understand that the Family Responsibility Office attempted to contact your constituency office last week to find out if there were any cases that you needed assistance on. Apparently, your phones weren't turned on, and someone from the NDP caucus office said to call back a week later.

If there is a problem, the member has been advised to let us know and we will look at it. But the member knows quite well that there can be a number of reasons that money isn't flowing. It can be as a result of the employer, the payor and sometimes indeed because the court has ordered certain adjustments to be made.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Harnick: I can tell you that the Family Responsibility Office distributes money within 24 to 48 hours of receiving it. If the money is being received, if there is no court order preventing a —

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): It's really interesting that the minister can always pretend somebody else is to blame. Quite frankly, Minister, if you don't care about the women and children who are suffering because they can't get their money, maybe you care about your friends the employers. We're getting more and more phone calls in our offices from employers who are furious about the way they're being treated by the FSP office.

I'll give you an example. Cathy Plinke, who works with Canadian Custom Countertops Inc in London, called my constituency office on Friday. Cathy had kept on receiving phone call after phone call from the FSP office demanding payment of moneys that had been remitted on the part of an employee, and each time she told them when the cheque had been remitted. On Thursday, FSP called four times, and each time the call was from a different worker and she had to give the same answer. Finally, on Friday, after another rude phone call from FSP when your staff member slammed the phone down in her ear, Cathy learned from her bank that the cheque had already been cashed.

Minister, this is a small business. There are small businesses all over this province that are experiencing great difficulty because you've messed up the program. When are you going to deal with the mess you've caused at the family support plan?

Hon Mr Harnick: We have made great strides in making it easier for employers to deal with the family support plan. We've introduced electronic banking. We've provided software programs so that the employers can much more easily than ever before remit money to the family support plan. The indications are that we are distributing money coming through the family support plan faster than it has ever been distributed before. Not only that, we continue to clean up the mess left by the regional offices. We are now down from 90,000 pieces of backlogged information to 38,000, things that had been neglected in the old family support plan for years, going back to 1993. We are making great strides in making the plan more accessible to the employers who help us distribute the money.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): There has been a tremendous concern in my constituency of Nepean in the last 12 years over the increase in welfare caseloads. There is a real understanding that welfare caseloads go up when unemployment rises, but my constituents have been very concerned that in the 1980s, as the unemployment rate dropped, the welfare caseload actually went up.

The provincial government has adjusted the welfare benefit rate. They have clarified the criteria. They've cracked down on any fraud in the system. Can the minister tell my constituents about not just the success of the welfare reforms in Ontario but specifically tell us how Ottawa-Carlton's performance has been, compared to the rest of the province?

Interjection.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): If we can do this over the comments of the Windsor-Sandwich member across the way, who seems to be unaware that what we've seen in Ontario is a marked break in the practice of the last 10 years on welfare, where we saw a 113% increase in the number of people on welfare — what we've seen in the last two years in Ontario is 218,000 fewer people, and that is translated in the region of Ottawa-Carleton into 6,600 fewer cases of people trapped on welfare. That's a 12% decrease. That shows that not only is there job growth in this province, but also that our welfare reforms are working.

Mr Baird: Minister, my constituents were concerned because in Ottawa-Carleton we're creating so many jobs that if the welfare rate went up like it did in the 1980s, we couldn't afford to pay it. Considering that the decrease has been a double-digit drop in the welfare caseload in Ottawa-Carleton, could the minister tell us specifically how the hardworking taxpayers, hardworking families, in Nepean will benefit from these reforms?

Hon Mrs Ecker: One of the exciting things about what is happening with the welfare caseload is not only

that it is a win for those individuals who are no longer trapped on welfare, and we know that the majority of them have left welfare for employment-related reasons, but the other good news is the savings for taxpayers. In the Ottawa-Carleton area they have saved over $14 million in the last two years because of these reductions.

If you're looking to try to put that into some sort of perspective for the public, this province is helping to fund two new high schools in this area, in the member's riding. Each one of those high schools costs about $10 million. That gives you some sense of what these savings can mean for taxpayers.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

Mr Bernard Grandmaître (Ottawa East): My question is to the minister responsible for francophone affairs. Monsieur le Ministre, le 4 novembre 1996, je vous ai posé une question en Chambre sur le transfert des services du niveau provincial aux municipalités. À ce moment-là vous avez été très vague. Vous avez parlé du rapport Qui Fait Quoi. Maintenant que l'étude Qui Fait Quoi a été déposée, est-ce que aujourd'hui vous pouvez devenir plus précis dans votre réponse et rassurer la communauté franco-ontarienne que tous les services provinciaux qui seront transférés au niveau municipal seront garantis à la communauté francophone de l'Ontario ?

L'hon Noble A. Villeneuve (ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones) : Merci à mon collègue d'Ottawa-Est. Comme vous le savez, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a tous les modes de prestation pour livrer les services en français à mesure que le transfert se fait des responsabilités du niveau provincial au niveau municipal. Maintenant, en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français, nous allons certainement desservir les régions qui sont sujettes à la Loi 8 et désignées.

J'ai eu l'occasion de rencontrer l'Association des municipalités franco-ontariennes. J'ai rencontré mon collègue des affaires municipales avec l'AMFO et nous en avons discuté. Nous allons faire cette étude, ainsi que desservir, programme par programme, et l'AMFO nous appuie fortement de ce côté-là. Je peux rassurer mon collègue d'Ottawa-Est qu'avec le soutien d'AMFO et avec les négociations qui vont se produire, nous allons bel et bien continuer à desservir notre francophonie ontarienne comme elle le connaît.

M. Bernard Grandmaître : Laissez-moi vous rassurer que j'ai rencontré l'Association des municipalités franco-ontariennes la semaine dernière, et c'était un des sujets d'inquiétude non seulement au niveau municipal de la communauté francophone.

Monsieur le Ministre, votre collègue le ministre des Affaires municipales était beaucoup plus précis que vous l'êtes aujourd'hui. La semaine dernière, le ministre des Affaires municipales disait qu'il était pour faire l'évaluation, que chaque programme sera évalué, mais par contre, aucune garantie ne sera donnée que les services seront maintenus. Je vous demande aujourd'hui, comme représentant de la francophonie en Ontario, est-ce que vous allez garantir que tous les services transférés au niveau municipal vont demeurer tels qu'ils sont aujourd'hui ?

L'hon M. Villeneuve : Je peux certainement garantir à mon collègue que les négociations se font programme par programme. Et puis, comme vous l'avez dit, mon collègue des affaires municipales lui a donné l'assurance aussi. Puis l'Office des Affaires francophones en Ontario va certainement travailler conjointement avec le ministère des Affaires municipales pour assurer que les services que nous connaissons en Ontario dans le moment vont continuer.

1530

EDUCATION FINANCING

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I have a question for the Minister of Education. Parents in my riding of Riverdale, a downtown east end Toronto riding, are very worried that you don't understand the special needs of inner-city schools. I understand you're going to be meeting with some of the Toronto parents, and I appreciate that, but there are schools in my riding where up to 90% of the students are new Canadians and need ESL, there are children who live in deep poverty, there are kids who need a space at school to do homework and need supplementary instruction after school, and those are just a few of the special needs.

We know that your funding formula is going to remove funding from the Toronto Board of Education. So I want to know today for the parents and kids in my riding, what measures are you going to take to ensure that these very special programs that are so badly needed in the schools in my riding remain intact?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I want to assure the member opposite that we do understand that there are different circumstances around the province of Ontario. In some parts of large urban centres like Toronto, we obviously find different circumstances than we would in smaller towns.

To do that, we have set out in our allocation model a foundation grant, a basic grant which we'll use across the province, and then seven special purpose grants. One of those is a language grant which will help to support, among other things, English-as-a-second-language students. They'll have a special grant which will help to meet their needs. The second is a learning opportunities grant which will support a variety of different programs which are necessary to help students who are at a greater risk of failure because of the social or economic circumstances they're in. We have addressed that very specifically in the allocation model and we'll make sure the funding is there for those programs.

Ms Churley: First of all, Minister, I would appreciate it if you would come to some of the schools in parts of my riding and see for yourself what the teachers have to deal with within some of these schools. It is a very tough job.

When you stand up today and talk about these grants, I guess the important question again is, we do not want to see things reduced to the lowest common denominator.

What I would ask you then in terms of those grants is, can you guarantee that the amount of money that goes to the schools from these grants will at least equal the amount of money that the schools are now getting from the board to ensure that the programs are at least as good as they are now? God knows they could use some improvement, but I can assure you that if they don't get the same funding, because they're already stretched, the kids in my riding who need these special programs are really going to be in trouble.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Question, please.

Ms Churley: Minister, can you assure me of that today?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I can assure the member that our intention is not just to maintain programs in the province but actually to improve them, particularly those programs for students who need our help the most. That includes special needs students, of course, but also students who come from social or economic backgrounds that require them to have special services in schools. We'll protect those services, we'll enhance those services by using the best practices in Ontario, and that's what our intention is.

As far as visiting schools is concerned, it's my privilege, and really my pleasure, to visit a lot of schools over the course of the school year. I have been to schools in your riding, as you know, and I will be again. I think I'm attending a school this very evening in Toronto to listen to parents and the concerns of parents regarding the Education Improvement Commission. That's my intention this evening. I look forward to visiting more schools, and undoubtedly schools in your riding.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Over the past number of weeks, critics in the opposition have been making unsubstantiated accusations about our government's summer jobs program. Could you please set the record straight and tell this House and my constituents about the impacts our summer jobs program has had.

Hon Noble Villeneuve (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I wish to thank my colleague from Oxford for that question. Yes, I am very pleased with what our government has done on summer job programs, particularly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. More than 2,800 students have found employment through the summer jobs program. It's an excellent investment in Ontario's youth.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): That's 2,800 fund-raisers.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: I hear the honourable member for Windsor-Sandwich, who about a month ago made this statement: "The Liberal Party has always been supportive of anything you can do for young people." Well, we have, and we're proud of it.

Mrs Pupatello: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I don't think that —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The members for London South and Halton Centre.

Mrs Pupatello: I rise on a point of order because my name was brought in by the minister. We don't think we agreed to hiring people for fund-raising out of the minister's office.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Supplementary?

New question, member for Kingston and The Islands.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): My question is to the Premier. Last week, the mayors —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I did call "supplementary," I think three times, so it is in fact too late, but you can seek unanimous consent to get your supplementary.

The member for Oxford is seeking unanimous consent for a supplementary question. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you, Mr Minister, for the answer. I know the opposition is not fond of hearing good news, and the summer jobs is a good start. Could you tell us how the future looks for the youth thinking of entering the agrifood business?

Hon Mr Villeneuve: To the honourable member and to all of my colleagues, I want to make the statement that the enrolments in the University of Guelph and all of our agricultural colleges are up considerably this year over last year, and those students have jobs when they graduate in the agrifood sector.

Ontario led the nation last year with $5.3 billion in agrifood exports. That is something to be very proud of and a very important economic generator in our province. The agrifood sector has contributed $25 billion to our economy every fiscal year, and this is an increasing number. So let's never, in this House or anywhere else, tell anyone in Ontario that the agrifood sector is not important. It is of utmost importance.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Mr Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that I'll be able to put my entire question plus the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The member for Kingston and The Islands is seeking unanimous consent to put his entire question plus the supplementary. Agreed? I heard a no.

Mr Gerretsen: All right. My question is still to the Premier. Premier, last week the mayors of Ontario's 25 largest municipalities representing over six million people met in Markham, as you probably know. They are extremely sceptical about your promises for the plans to push responsibility for social services on to the local municipalities.

As a matter of fact, Al Linwin, the mayor of St Catharines and the chair of this group, said, "We're

saying to the Premier it's to the point of not only being unfair but almost dishonest to the electorate of the province." Hazel McCallion says you either know what the impact is and you're afraid to say so or you don't know and you're fumbling. She suspects the first reason, but I'm waiting for you to answer with respect to the downloading, Mr Premier.

Councils need to know exactly what they are going to budget for for next year. You said in the Common Sense Revolution that you would work closely with municipalities to ensure that any actions you took would not result in increases to local property taxes. Premier, the municipalities have now been forced to hire an outside consultant to give them an independent analysis of your downloading plans. Why don't you produce the plans and show that they're revenue-neutral or else do a 180-degree turn, as you did with Bill 136, and take away the downloading of responsibility for health, social services and social housing? Why don't you do that, Premier?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): We of course have done that. We have tabled all the numbers. In fact, we tabled the options. All the upper-tier numbers have been tabled to the penny. We tabled as well options and the numbers that would flow from that based upon how you go from upper tier to lower tier. Representatives of the large municipalities were at the table when all those numbers were tabled. They said: "We don't want to look at them. We don't want to be part of the decision. You make it. It's an election year, don't you know?" So we are making those decisions. They have abdicated, I would say, any decision-making on how you might move that way.

Let me assure the mayors that overall from the province's point of view it is revenue-neutral. We understand that depending on options selected from different municipalities, there will be different impacts. But I can assure them that just as Mel Lastman says, "No need for tax hikes," just as your former colleague, now running for regional chair, says, "No need for tax hikes" —

The Speaker: Thank you.

1540

PETITIONS

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): Despite the government's turnaround on Bill 136, there's a great deal of concern that we have not seen the amendments. Until that's the case, these petitions will be coming forward. This one reads:

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 will effectively suspend all labour relations rights for municipal, health and school board employees affected by provincially forced amalgamations; and

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 will hurt average workers in every community across Ontario including nurses, teachers, firemen and police officers; and

"Whereas the Harris government's bill will decrease the quality of health care as well as the quality of education delivered in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 was designed to provide the government with sweeping powers to override long-standing labour negotiation rights for workers including the right to negotiate, the right to strike, the right to seek binding arbitration and the right to choose a bargaining unit;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, support our MPP Michael Gravelle in his opposition to this legislation and join him in calling upon the Harris government to repeal Bill 136, which creates a climate of confrontation in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign my name to that petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): I have a petition signed by almost 300 people in support of Women's College Hospital. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Whereas only 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Whereas women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Whereas Women's College is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to research and treatment dedicated to women's health needs;

"Whereas the World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as the sole collaborating centre for women's health for both North and South America;

"Whereas without Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and of the world will lose a health resource that will not be duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the continuance, independence, women-centred focus and accessible downtown location of the one hospital most crucial to the future of women's health, Women's College Hospital."

I agree with that petition and I have affixed my name to it as well.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 35 people. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to continue to urge the government of

Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE DISABLED

Mr Gilles E. Morin (Carleton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced Bill 142, An Act to revise the law related to Social Assistance by enacting the Ontario Works Act and the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, by repealing the Family Benefits Act, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act and the General Welfare Assistance Act and by amending several other Statutes; and

"Whereas Bill 142 and its regulations will have a direct and substantial impact on the lives of many people with disabilities and their families;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urge the government of Ontario to release the proposed regulations related to Bill 142 immediately, so there can be meaningful public discussion of the changes that will result from this legislation and to ensure that Bill 142 and its regulations are subject to extensive and public hearings across Ontario so that the people who are affected by this legislation and the related regulations are given adequate opportunity to be heard."

I have signed the petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Only about 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Women's College is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to teaching, research and care dedicated to women;

"The World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as its first collaborating centre for women's health in both North and South America;

"Without a self-governing Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and of the world will lose a health resource that is not duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the comprehensive model of women's health pioneered by Women's College Hospital through ensuring self-governance of the one hospital in Ontario dedicated to women's health."

I affix my signature to this petition.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): I have a petition signed by 52 constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas communities strongly disagree with allowing women to go topless in public;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To enact legislation to require women to wear tops in public places for the protection of our children and for public safety in general."

I will sign this so that it will be presented in the proper mode.

ABORTION

Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario health system is overburdened and unnecessary spending must be cut; and

"Whereas pregnancy is not a disease, injury or illness and abortions are not therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the vast majority of abortions are done for reasons of convenience or finance; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario has exclusive authority to determine what service will be insured; and

"Whereas the Canada Health Act does not require funding for elective procedures; and

"Whereas there is mounting evidence that abortion is in fact hazardous to women's health; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers funded over 45,000 abortions in 1993 at an estimated cost of $25 million;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to cease from providing any taxpayers' dollars for performing of abortions."

This is signed by 20 residents of Brockville, SD&G and the Cornwall riding.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 will effectively suspend all labour relations rights for municipal, health and school board employees affected by provincially forced amalgamations; and

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 will hurt average workers in every community across Ontario including nurses, teachers, firemen and police officers; and

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 was designed to provide the government with sweeping powers to override long-standing labour negotiation rights for workers, including the right to negotiate, the right to strike, the right to seek binding arbitration and the right to choose a bargaining unit;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, support our MPP Frank Miclash in his opposition to this legislation and join him in calling upon the Harris government to repeal Bill 136, which creates a climate of confrontation in Ontario."

You can be assured that I have signed this petition as well.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott and Russell): A petition against the fingerprinting plan of Mike Harris.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, has proposed the fingerprinting of all Ontario citizens; and

"Whereas the fingerprinting of Ontarians was never promised in the Common Sense Revolution or in his election campaign; and

"Whereas universal fingerprinting of Ontario citizens is a direct violation of basic civil rights and fundamental rights of privacy; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government is intervening and intruding into all aspects of daily life, from megacities, user fees, rent controls, and market value taxes, which were never promised in the election campaign;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to oppose Mike Harris's plan to fingerprint Ontario citizens and to respect their privacy and to stop creating a mega-government that does not respect the basic freedom and individuality of the citizens of Ontario."

This is signed by over 100 citizens of Ontario.

1550

TVONTARIO

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): The TVO petition campaign calling on the government for consultation in their privatization is sweeping across the province. I have a petition here signed by the residents of Amelia Street West in Thunder Bay, sent in by Claire Cikalik, and I appreciate it. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas TVOntario/TFO is owned by the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has opposed public support for maintaining TVO as a publicly owned and funded educational broadcaster by putting TVO through a privatization review; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has not confirmed that full public participation will be part of this privatization review;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold open and honest public consultation with the people of Ontario before making a decision on the future of TVO/TFO."

I am glad to sign my name to this petition.

STANDING ORDERS REFORM

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): This is an extremely important petition that is addressed to the Legislature of Ontario. It deals with the draconian new rules that we have in this House. It states:

"Whereas the people of Ontario want rigorous discussion on legislation dealing with public policy issues like health care, education and care for seniors; and

"Whereas many people in Ontario believe that the Mike Harris government is moving too quickly and recklessly, creating havoc with the provision of quality health care and quality education, and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has passed new legislative rules which have eroded the ability of both the public and the media to closely scrutinize the actions of the Ontario government; and

"Whereas Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, when they were in opposition, defended the rights of the opposition and used the rules to their full advantage when they believed it was necessary to slow down the passage of controversial legislation; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has now reduced the amount of time that MPPs will have to debate the important issues of the day; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government, through its rule changes, has diminished the role of elected members of the Legislative Assembly who are accountable to the people who elect them and instead has chosen to concentrate power in the Premier's office in the hands of people who are not elected officials;

"We, the undersigned, call upon Mike Harris to withdraw his draconian rule changes and restore rules which promote rigorous debate on contentious issues and hold the government accountable to the people of Ontario."

I am in full agreement with that and I have endorsed it.

CREMATORIUM IN VAUGHAN

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I have a further petition with respect to a crematorium that is being built in the vicinity of my riding in the city of North York. I wish to read it to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas an application has been submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Energy for a certificate of approval for the development of a crematorium and a columbarium at the northeast corner of Jane Street and Steeles Avenue West in the city of Vaughan; and

"Whereas the residents who live in close proximity to this proposed crematorium are extremely concerned about the harmful environmental effects resulting from the emissions to the atmosphere, seriously fear the spread of contaminants from this planned six-furnace high-rise crematorium and are alarmed about the long-term effects on their health; and

"Whereas there is a further apprehension in this high-density residential community that due to budget considerations and cutbacks, the Ministry of Environment and Energy will not take the time to effectively, openly and fairly listen to, consider and assess the community's concern on the huge ramifications;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"We call upon the Ministry of Environment and Energy, which has the primary responsibility for protecting and enhancing a healthful environment for the present and future wellbeing of the people of Ontario, to:

"(1) recognize that we, the citizens most adversely affected by this proposal, have the right to participate in government decision-making;

"(2) honour its commitment to safeguard our environment and therefore reject this proposal for a crematorium of such a large scale and literally at our doorsteps;

"(3) acknowledge that the health of thousands of residents will be at risk and thereby refuse to grant approval for this project."

I concur, and I affix my signature to it.

TRANSFER OF PROVINCIAL HIGHWAYS

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): I'm proud to present a petition signed by hundreds of constituents living in west Renfrew county, which petition reads:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Ontario government to retain Highway 62 from Maynooth to the village of Barry's Bay as a provincial highway, as it is a significant access corridor to and from southern Ontario and is vital to the industrial and tourism sectors of the regional economy here in the Madawaska Valley, and to ensure its prominence as an access corridor on provincial and regional roadmaps. A provincial highway would allow for a consistent level of maintenance and avoid placing an increased financial burden upon local taxpayers."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition which I support wholeheartedly.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ONTARIO HYDRO NUCLEAR AFFAIRS

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for the appointment of a select committee on Ontario Hydro nuclear affairs.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): When I last intervened in this debate, I pointed out that our party would prefer that the government appoint an independent commission to look into the affairs of Ontario Hydro and to give that commission a longer time frame than is proposed in this motion. The government intends to have a select committee which will be dominated by members of its own party and to give it a very constricted time frame, which we don't think will be adequate to properly deal with the very difficult questions that face us with regard to Ontario Hydro.

The great question that lies before us is the government's white paper. The government has indicated that it intends to bring forward a response to the Macdonald commission. I suspect that that Liberal father of free trade will be quite happy, because he not only proposed open competition but a large dose of privatization, and I suspect that this government is going to do that as well. Our caucus supports competition, but only if the environment and the consumer are protected. The kind of selloffs that I think are being contemplated by this government make even less sense now than they did a year ago, when Macdonald made his report. No one is going to buy the nuclear plants now. No investor in his or her right mind would make that kind of investment.

We call on the government to bring forward its white paper so the people of this province will have a better idea of what the government's agenda really is. We can only really evaluate the Hydro nuclear recovery plan if we know where the province is going in terms of competition and privatization. There are a number of questions that the white paper must answer and that the committee will have to consider:

What is the best way of ensuring that competition brings environmental benefits? How much stranded debt will there be, and how will stranded asset charges work in practice? What measures can be taken to ensure that any benefits of competition in the form of lower prices are shared equally among consumers no matter where in the province they live, whether they're in rural Ontario or urban Ontario, whether they are residential consumers or commercial or industrial consumers? Will competition provide opportunities for Ontario entrepreneurs and communities or will it mainly mean more business for American multinationals?

We know that already a number of large American utilities have set up shop here in Toronto and they are just salivating at the prospect of investing in certain parts of Ontario Hydro. What the effects of the recent report about the nuclear division will have on that I'm not certain, but these are issues that must be considered by the committee, if the government is determined to move forward with a select committee.

1600

As I indicated, we are very concerned about the time frame. To suggest that the government must have an interim report in 17 days from the time the motion was first placed was just completely unrealistic and of course is even more unrealistic today, because the motion has not been passed and we are still debating it. In that regard, I have an amendment to present.

I move that the motion be amended by striking the words "an interim report to the House by October 3, 1997 and" following the words "That the committee present" at the beginning of the second paragraph.

Obviously the reason for the amendment is that the current wording of the motion is impractical, considering the date of September 22. It just would not give the committee, if the select committee is established, time to do the work, to do the evaluation, have the witnesses, have the hearings that would be required in order to get an interim report ready by that date. For that reason, the amendment would remove that requirement on the committee from the motion.

I am sure most members would agree that this is reasonable, and I know the minister supports such an amendment. In the spirit of cooperation that is always demonstrated by myself and my caucus, we are moving forward here to assist the government in moving forward, despite the fact that we don't prefer the select committee route. We would prefer a commission that is independent, has no party loyalties to consider, that would be able to properly investigate, and we would prefer, as I have indicated, a much longer time frame so that we can get to the bottom of some very serious and complex questions.

The government appears to be determined to move forward on the select committee. If that is the case, then obviously the time frame must be adjusted to take into account the fact that the motion has not yet been passed. I hope that all members will support the motion, but I would hope that the government, even in the last few minutes, will reconsider and appoint an independent commission.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Further debate.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): Just a brief word, since we have an amendment now before the House. I think the member has offered a helpful and timely amendment, and at the insistence of my House leader, my colleagues and I will certainly be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker: First, we'll vote on the amendment by Mr Wildman. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

We vote now on the motion to strike the committee.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

DEVELOPMENT CHARGES ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LES REDEVANCES D'AMÉNAGEMENT

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for third reading of Bill 98, An Act to promote job creation and increased municipal accountability while providing for the recovery of development costs related to new growth / Projet de loi 98, Loi visant à promouvoir la création d'emplois et à accroître la responsabilité des municipalités tout en prévoyant le recouvrement des coûts d'aménagement liés à la croissance.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): It is always a pleasure to have a few moments to speak to the perfidy of this government. In this particular instance today, we're dealing with Bill 98. I'll read it for the benefit of the public so they will get a good sense of the kind of money that goes into some propaganda office in the government's office. It's called An Act to promote job creation and increased municipal accountability while providing for the recovery of development costs related to new growth.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): How will this impact on the fund-raisers?

Mr Marchese: It will, and I will speak to that, member for St Catharines. I will speak to that because this is part of the bill.

Just to speak to the title for brief second, you will recall that this is something of a favourite subject of mine, because the government, as you have observed, spends a great deal of time on titling the bills. I am sure they know that every cent — and they spend a lot of cents on this — is well-spent, because the spin is important. I'm convinced the Premier's office has an office called the propaganda office to promote the re-election of Tory members. That is probably paid by every taxpayer that these fine Tories know all over the province.

In the end, even their own members are beginning to understand there is something underneath that slippery carpet that they need to unearth, and they are unearthing it as they deal with each and every one of these bills. There is nothing in this bill that promotes job creation, we know that, and there is nothing in this bill that deals with increased municipal accountability. I will speak to that as well.

For the benefit of those who are watching, and I know there are many who are watching —

Mr Bradley: I will be watching.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, member for St Catharines. I know you'll be back for the two-minute rebuttal, and I appreciate that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Order.

Mr Marchese: I want to give some background; not context in this particular instance, but background.

You will recall when this government introduced the bill originally, municipalities were to pick up 10% of costs for hard services such as water, transit and sewer, and make a 30% contribution for soft services such as libraries, community centres and recreation centres. That originally was what was in the bill.

You will recall that Hazel McCallion, a good friend of this government, when hearing of this, went ballistic.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): What did she say?

Mr Marchese: I don't have the words in front of me, but everyone knows it because I've used it in other speeches. I don't want to repeat what she said. Hazel McCallion, a good Tory and a good friend of these people over here, when she heard of this, went bananas, and she made it very clear —

Mr David Turnbull (York Mills): I thought you said she went ballistic.

Mr Marchese: Mr Turnbull, she went bananas, and you know that.

Mr Turnbull: Is that "bananas" or "bananas"?

Mr Marchese: The whip is correcting me on the pronunciation of "bananas" versus "bananas." It's the same thing in the end.

So you had Hazel McCallion on the one side saying, "Government, if you do this you are in trouble," and immediately realized that this would be a cost that municipalities simply could not bear. In fact, she knew that if this went through, many of the things that normally would

happen in new developments would no longer happen, because they couldn't afford it.

So what did this fine woman do? She immediately slapped a freeze on new development, and then mon ami M. Leach went crazy at the other end too. He scrambled pretty quickly, trying to figure out a way to deal with this emerging problem.

Hazel and others were a problem for this government. In the 905 region, we find Hazel and other Tory mayors, and they weren't happy with this either. They went ballistic as well. Not only Hazel McCallion of Mississauga but other mayors quickly responded by saying, "We will impose a freeze on new development if this government doesn't back away." So you've got on the one hand people who normally are supportive of this government, and not just politicians; you also have a population in the 905 who are strongly supportive of this government. You have close to 60% to 70% of those people supporting them, or at least in the past. I'm not convinced that number still holds. But if 70% or so of those people voted for these guys, they immediately realized, "We've got a problem." Hazel was symbolic and representative of that view of each and every voter in that region, the 905 region just outside Metropolitan Toronto.

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You had politicians on the one side screaming bloody murder — they were worried that such people could infect politically the views of the poor electorate in that area so they had to do something — versus the other side, which is the Urban Development Institute, of which you will recall, and I have mentioned this often in the past, Morley Kells, the Conservative member in the House, was the president, and you had the Ontario home builders and other developers who showed initially their political muscle in getting this particular bill for debate.

You had in this ring of fighters the developers, but quickly my good friend M. Leach and others discovered that you had the other fighters in the other corner. You had Hazel, an admirable foe, a tough foe, and you had the other people who vote for you guys on the other side. They were caught in this fierce battle between developers coming to this government and saying, "Help us, please, Conservative government. We're on your side. You know this. We've been screaming for years for help and nobody has listened and finally we've elected you to be the portavoce of our views. Listen to us," and they did. That's why you have Bill 98.

But they didn't realize that in listening to developers, in listening to the Urban Development Institute, the portavoce of corporate views, somehow they would be embroiled in a political mess, and it was a big mess. It lasted for months. They had a fight on their hands, and I'm not sure who won in the end, but it's quite clear to me that in the changes this government has made, the developers suffered a little loss as a result of having to genuflect in front of the powers of Hazel McCallion and the 905 electorate.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Fort York, please address your remarks to the Chair.

Mr Marchese: As opposed to whom, Mr Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: As opposed to your colleague to your left. Procedures are very clear: Address your remarks to the Chair.

Mr Marchese: Speaker, I appreciate —

The Deputy Speaker: No argument, please.

Mr Marchese: Well, Speaker, I'm going to look at you as I speak but I will remind you that it would be very difficult for any human being to sit here and address you in everything I say. Surely a member has got to move around —

The Deputy Speaker: Please take your chair. You are showing a lack of respect for the Chair. Procedures are very, very clear. Address your remarks to the Chair, and if you can't, then I'll stop you.

Mr Marchese: I will do my best, Speaker.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I don't believe we have a quorum right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Could you please check if there is a quorum?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Fort York.

Mr Marchese: When the mayor of Mississauga said, "Look, you better make some changes," the government said, and Mr Leach obviously must have had some discussions with her and said, "We are going to consider changes to the bill," and as a result of his initiative to make some changes to the bill, Hazel McCallion relented a little bit. There was a great deal of work. Clearly they had to go back and talk to the developers. I'm sure there must have been a hell of a lot of negotiation going on with the developers, at the same time trying to please Hazel, probably urging the developers to let up a little bit and not criticize them too much as they considered changes to this bill.

She had given a deadline in the past, saying, "If you don't do this by a certain date" — this was last December 6 — "we will continue with this freeze," but relented on the deadline, and the 905 municipalities tried to negotiate that compromise. Obviously they arrived at a compromise and were happy about that. I argued, as many municipal politicians argued, that this was going to be very hurtful to their communities, and it was. Even people like Hazel McCallion realized this was a giveaway to the developers. Even if she is well connected to them, she realized the benefit would go to developers and not to her constituency and constituents.

This is another example of a government that was prepared to go too far, too fast, hurting services that people care about.

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): The benefits will go to the home buyers.

Mr Gerretsen: How do you know that, Al? You don't know that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Fort York has the floor. Order, please.

Mr Marchese: We've seen it over and over again with every bill. This government is going too far, too fast and usually very wrong in the areas they have entered into. It isn't a matter of speed that is the mistake this government makes; it is a matter that they're going in the wrong direction. Imagine, it's like you're travelling north and you as a government are proceeding to travel against that traffic, and not just fast but in the wrong direction, if you understand the image. That's the problem many of us are facing as a public, because they're beginning to understand the wrongheaded policies of the government, and in addition they're going much too fast.

You will recall, Speaker — and I will touch on this, but I want to get to some aspects of other things the minister has done in the past, to show how they are connected closely to the developers. This act is supposed to promote job creation. This act is supposed to remove some of those development charges, and as a result of removing some of those development charges, they said new homeowners would somehow save money, because whatever costs were saved by not having a development charge, somehow, miraculously, through the alchemy of the 17th century, new homeowners would be able to see a saving. Well, we know that's not true. I'll come back to this theme and I'll touch on a subject I have dealt with in the past as a reminder, to show that what this government does often doesn't lead to those savings.

You will recall the same developers going to M. Leach. This was done not with any public consultation; this was done with no debate, as is customary in that ministry on issues of this sort; this was done with my good friend M. Leach, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, probably over a cup of coffee or dinner. It probably wouldn't be at Dooney's Café; it would be a place like La Fenice, a good restaurant I will admit, or maybe the minister's office. Who knows? It was over a discussion of that sort but, I tell you, there was no public discussion on this issue.

What is the issue I'm talking about? The issue of the removal of the full-height insulation requirement and the relaxation of the basement drainage protection rules.

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Hon Mr Leach: We went out there and we had conversations —

Mr Marchese: No, Minister, you did this on your own. We are in good contact with some of the people in your ministry — not good contact. These are things we know about, that are public, really. It's not as if I have dug into the ministry to acquire information that is private. There was, as far as I know and as far as anybody knows in this field, no public discussion whatsoever.

Hon Mr Leach: No, wrong.

Mr Marchese: In your two-minute rebuttal you tell me how I'm wrong. I want to hear from you in this regard.

The full-height insulation requirement is no longer necessary. It is something we did as a New Democratic Party government because we felt this was a good thing for new homeowners to have. Full-height insulation is good. The other, the basement drainage protection, is also good. Remember, drainage protection is something you have around the house. It prevents water from seeping into the house. My view is that it was good.

Hon Mr Leach: You've got the economic impact study.

Mr Marchese: Well, okay. This minister probably believes that flooded basements are better and that not having a full basement insulation requirement is perhaps energy-efficient. I'm not sure. I don't find it consistent with energy-efficient methodologies but he obviously believes that. I tell you this: The other developer said, "Minister, if you do these two things, the new homeowner will save $1,000 to $3,000." That's what they said, that there would be a saving. There was no saving.

I worked very closely with an organization called the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance and they have done a survey of their members to inquire about these so-called savings. You know what it reveals? It reveals that there were no savings, that the savings were not passed on. In fact, in many cases prices of housing went up, leaving new homeowners with the new task of having to put insulation in their basement on their own.

We have to speak about common sense from time to time, and this government often likes to speak of common sense as well. You figure that one out: You put in full-height insulation in the beginning, as you build the house, versus you, the homeowner, putting in insulation once the house has been constructed. Which of the two options do you believe would be cheaper for the homeowner? It's not a very complicated thing. I think it's simple even for the MPPs on the other side to solve, I really do. I believe that given that this government is so full of common sense, even Tory backbenchers and ministers could calculate the difference between the two. They should, at least. The answer to that is that it's cheaper if you have full-height insulation done when you build the house rather than requiring the homeowner to do it on his own. That's more costly.

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton): Let me ask about windows. Tell us about that.

Mr Marchese: M. Beaubien, it's more costly. If you do it on your own, it's more costly. Why? Because —

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: It's okay. M. Beaubien is a good man. Every now and then I like his responses. That's all right. We know that if this fellow had to do it on his own, it would take a hell of a long time to do. But because people sometimes don't either have the knowhow or the time, they end up hiring somebody else to do that job. Given that they have to hire somebody else after the fact, after the house has been built, surely the Tory MPPs would calculate that it's more costly to do, and it is. The Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance has through their study determined that what I am saying is correct.

Why would the minister unilaterally have done that?

Hon Mr Leach: It would take about 300 years —

Mr Marchese: I'm not sure I heard that quite clearly, but perhaps in the rebuttal I'll hear it. Why would you do that unilaterally, I ask you?

Hon Mr Leach: I answered. It was quite clear.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Mr Marchese: No, Minister, you said the answer was quite clear. I put the context to the general public that is listening —

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Always through you, Speaker, to the minister.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: The minister says that it's quite clear. I've just given the context to explain to the general public that what he did unilaterally, without the benefit of input from those who have traditionally been involved, was made into a decision that was wrong. It was wrongheaded and everybody in the industry knew it, including developers.

Those developers who were brave enough to admit this to us told us frankly that there were no savings. But because the benefit is to the developer, why would the developer go out in public and tell you what the minister did was wrong? They're not going to do that. They're buddies. Why would they, in public, go and say that somehow the minister was wrong when these are the same people who told him and urged him to do this?

The benefits are quite clear: The developer saves money, he pockets it, and that problem is passed on to the homeowner, and the poor fellow, the new homeowner, who can barely keep up with the costs of ordinary life, has to pick up yet another burden.

We know that new homeowners don't have the means, the money, the time or the knowhow to deal with some of these issues or some of these costs. If the government really wanted to help the new homeowner, he would not have done that unilaterally, removed those two basic protections. Simple stuff, but he did that.

Why do I speak about this issue? I speak about it because it's connected to this Bill 98, because this bill says it is An Act to promote job creation. I raise the other issue to give the context, to show that the verbiage on the other side about savings to the homeowner — because that's what the developers told them. If you remove the full-height insulation plus the drainage on the outside, that wouldn't help the homeowner. If he wanted to do something for them, he should not have done that. Clearly he is taking sides, and he took sides with the developers.

This particular bill has been somewhat improved, I have to say, and improved because of obstinacy and the war that was waged by those in the 905 region. Even the Crombie Who Does What panel strongly opposed the changes to the Development Charges Act. You will remember Grant Hopcroft, one of the members of the Crombie panel, a staunch Tory controller from London, has been vocally critical of the government's decision. It wasn't just an ordinary bunch of people out there who might have disagreed. There are a whole lot of people with political knowledge and expertise who said this was wrong.

With that opposition, the government had to relent and they have made it less harmful. I praise them for that, because at least they listened to the extent that it will not be as harmful as it otherwise would have been. You've got to praise them when they listen. The bill is wrongheaded but the made it palatable by making it less injurious to the constituency.

What they've got now is that the existing municipal tax base will have to pick up 10% of the costs of services such as libraries, community centres and recreation centres. Some costs, such as construction costs for the city administrative buildings, parks, museums and arts centres, will be ineligible for development charge funding. That's completely unacceptable under this bill. Where previously they had the power to charge through development charges for administrative buildings, for parks and museums and arts centres, they now no longer can do that.

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I remind you that that flexibility municipalities had to use development charges for the purposes of the public good was a good thing. That flexibility that we as an NDP government provided we argue was good for municipalities. They've taken away that flexibility. Even if they'd made it less injurious; they've taken away the flexibility and are requiring municipalities to pick up 10% of the costs for libraries, community centres and recreation centres.

When you move into a community, as mon ami Gilles Pouliot was reminding me the other day, you are moving into a community. You're not simply buying a home; you are buying a home in a particular community that has services attached to it. You're not going to buy a home if there is no library on that site. You will not buy a home if there are no community centres or recreation centres. You will not buy a home if parks are inadequately provided for in terms of services to maintain them, or museums, for God's sake. These are the cultural elements that provide some humanity to the community in which they live. You don't buy a freestanding home alone; you buy it with all the services and infrastructures that come with it.

This government, with its original mandate, would have destroyed much of that. Now, with municipalities picking up 10% of the tab for libraries and community centres and recreation centres and all the other stuff they cannot fund any more, such as administrative buildings and parks and museums and arts centres, they're going to have a hell of a time. They're going to have a hard time finding the money to provide for these things. Is it far-fetched to say that? Is it an impossibility, these guys will argue, for these municipalities to come up with the money to do these things? I argue that it is. I argue that with the 40% cuts that municipalities have had to endure to their budgets, it is pretty difficult to find the money.

I argue that with Bill 152, the download bill, the bill that dumps responsibility down to the municipalities to provide for themselves, there's going to be a heavy load to bear. I argue, and I blame this government, that as they

take education out of the property tax and substitute for that new services the municipalities will have to pick up, such as social assistance, child care, housing, ambulances, police, public health, good God, they're not going to be able to do it. That's why they're worried. That's why Hazel, as Tory as she is, blue inside and out, knows that this is a bill you've got to worry about. She knows because of all the things this government is doing to relieve itself of the responsibility to govern by offloading that responsibility of finance to the municipal government.

It's a funny thing, because in so many other areas this government embraces municipal autonomy, when it suits them. When it suits them, they love to talk about how municipalities in their autonomy are so effective and efficient that they must let them do the dirty deed. When it suits them, they love to give municipalities power. When it doesn't suit them, they take that power away. In this particular instance, it suits them to give this responsibility down to the municipalities. Municipalities are very worried about picking up what appears to be a cost that is not too heavy. But it is a heavy cost.

I wouldn't want to be a municipal politician in the next municipal election. I know there are many candidates who want to show leadership, who feel they have a vision, who feel that somehow, in spite of what this government is doing, they will be able to provide the best political service they can. But this is the worst of times that this responsibility as a politician could befall you. Never in our history have we had to face a government that has cut back so much of its funding to municipalities — all to service that tax cut, I remind you. Because of the income tax cut, because of that tax cut that largely goes to middle-class people, this government is stuck. It has to find billions of dollars every year to fund the tax cut.

Look what they're doing to education. They're putting a ceiling on the classroom size, they say. It sounds great. But these poor people in the boards of education, without money, are faced with tremendous problems to deal with that particular problem.

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): A point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like you to ascertain if there is a quorum. I believe we don't have a quorum.

The Deputy Speaker: Could you please check if there is a quorum.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Fort York.

Mr Marchese: I was telling you how worried I am about the fact that municipalities are burdened with a great responsibility. I was telling you that the Minister of Education has a strong desire — not he; it's Mike Harris, the Premier; it's their agenda. They have an interest in taking $1 billion out of education, and that in the guise of educational reform. They're doing it because they need cash. They need money right away, so they've got a problem.

They've got to take $1 billion out of education. I tell you it will be a tremendous assault on the education system, on teachers and students. Dianne Cunningham, the minister of women's affairs, would know that, as a former teacher. She knows that this will be very destructive to teachers and students as these people rape the education system for the money they need.

To be a municipal politician, a trustee, in these times — I wouldn't want the job. They're going to be faced with a severe reduction of services to deal with a shortfall of provincial money that traditionally has flowed to them. They're going to be in a tough bind, I can tell you that, with their electorate, and not this election but the following election when they have to face the public with two things: increased property taxes and decreased services. It's not going to be a pretty sight for those municipal governments.

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The Planning Act allows municipalities to require a parkland dedication of up to 5%. That hasn't been changed, but the bill prohibits them from using development charges to fund parks over and above this, as some of them had apparently been doing.

The Ontario Parks Association is concerned that this will mean fewer and less-well-maintained parks. I'm worried. I know municipal politicians are worried about that too. Whereas they had the flexibility in the past and the discretion as municipal politicians to use their powers as they saw fit to serve their constituencies, now that power is taken away from them. That principle of this government that embraces municipal autonomy is in this particular instance corroded, corrupted, dismissed.

I argue that the power the municipal politicians had in the past was an important flexible power they had to service their constituencies. These people, these Tories, are taking that away. They're saying municipal politicians are not responsible or accountable enough to do the job well. In the one instance, with other bills, they say, "Ha, the opposition members don't trust politicians." On the other hand, in this particular case we do. If in the past it worked to give municipal politicians that autonomy and responsibility to be able to make reasoned, commonsense decisions, why take that away? Why would you take it away while at the same time as you pass other bills you tell them: "We trust you, municipal politicians, to do the right thing. We want to give you the power to do the right thing. We want to give you the power, to trustees to be able to cut as you see fit so taxes don't go up. We want to give you the power not to increase property taxes and to do the right thing as we download a thousand services on you."

On the one hand they say: "You guys are good, responsible. You guys are accountable. You guys are efficient." In this particular case they take that little power — it's a little power — to make their communities more efficient, more human —

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): The essence of life, nothing else.

Mr Marchese: M. Pouliot, mon ami, the essence of life, to make a community more human. It is the essence of who we are.

Mr Bradley: Did you mention the fund-raisers yet?

Mr Marchese: No, I haven't been able to talk about fund-raisers but fund-raisers is a good point, because when they have the big fund-raisers they don't do it like the NDP, where you charge $25 for a little fund-raiser with good food.

Mr Pouliot: This is the mother of fund-raisers.

Mr Marchese: Mothers of fund-raisers, I tell you. When these guys have fund-raisers, they invite the big boys for $500 plates, $1,000 plates if they're good patrons.

Mr Pouliot: And the meal?

Mr Marchese: And the meals are well-paid. With $500 or $1,000, you can have a hell of a meal. I've never had a developer come to my fund-raising event, and it's only $25.

Mr Bradley: Good food?

Mr Marchese: Good food.

Mr Bradley: Maybe I'll come.

Mr Marchese: You should, because we have good Latin American dancing at our events and it's a very allegro type of event. It's not lugubrious, as these people would have it, and they pay a hell of a big buck for a lugubrious event, a Tory event.

When they go helping the developers, it comes with fund-raising; of course it does. You think these guys come to fund-raisers and don't lay out the big bucks for the services these people have provided? I tell you, they do.

Me, instead? I don't worry about the big developers because —

Mr Beaubien: I don't have a big appetite.

Mr Marchese: Mr Beaubien, your developer friends, they're okay, they've got the bucks, they create a human life for their own individual life. But do you think they put as much back into humanizing their communities? I don't think they do that and that's why the Ontario Parks Association is very worried. Sure, you dedicate up to 5% of parkland. Sure, that's okay. But this bill prohibits them from using development charges to fund parks over and above that so they're well-maintained. Isn't that part of the humanity of a community?

If you take that away, what have you got? You've got developers in the golf field, you've got developers in the Bahamas enjoying the good life, the human life, with all of its services. They like those recreational services because they can pay for it. But back home on the ranch they're without the essential services that each one of us breathes for. So people are worried. I'm worried. If someone doesn't expose the perfidy of the Tory agenda we have a problem. Someone's got to do it.

Back to the bill. Again, as they say, this is An Act to promote job creation. Do you remember that? These developers said: "This is going to stimulate house construction. We're going to have a boom. Trust me."

M. Leach, a good defender of that ideology, said, "Yes, of course." Hand in hand. "Of course we're going to do it." He believes this agenda; he believes this ideology. All of them do on the other side. They said, "You take development charges out and we're going to see development and a boom you've never seen before." It's got nothing to do with it. Speaker, even you as a Liberal would know this has nothing to do with it.

Everybody knows the housing boom is driven not by development charges but by supply and demand, the marketplace, the altar of Tory ideology. The Tory ideology says let the market do it; the market will take care of itself.

"If you get development charges out," they say, "We're going to get more housing." It's not true. If people can afford a house, they're going to buy it and if people can't afford a house, they will not buy it. Development charges are sucked up by the developer and the poor homeowner who was told he's going to benefit from this because the savings are going to be passed on is out of luck. That young 30-year-old couple — because now you can't afford to buy a house before 30, 33, maybe 35, that's when you start buying a house — these people can't afford it. They go in with this belief that somehow they might believe these guys that they're going to save a few bucks, but they're not saving it. The guy who pockets it is that poor developer who's starving to death.

Mr Bradley: You mean, it's not going to the home buyer?

Mr Marchese: No, it's going to the developer. Those poor developers need the money to be able to travel around, to be able to feed those they lobby, to be able to feed their friends. The cost of living is pretty expensive. You can't be in this big league and not have enough money in your pocket to feed those you lobby. You can't be in the big league as a developer, right, and travel around the world with the big yacht and not have money left in your pocket.

Mr Pouliot: With top-notch polyester.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Lake Nipigon.

Mr Marchese: Without the money in the pocket they can't do that, they can't keep the style of living — Speaker, always through you; you notice I'm speaking through you now to the members opposite — leaving the poor homeowner on his own.

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Think of the poor homeowner today. Two people I know, closely connected to my family, one of them making $32,000, the other one was making $27,000 working in one of these clothing industry — I won't name the company because it might not be nice for them to be named. My good friend's name is Mark. The last name will remain anonymous. The other good friend of mine is Lorena, working in a good service industry where the needs are plenty, young women who have lots of problems. She's working in such a place, providing the best that she can for $30,000, $31,000 a year, working every day, including Saturdays, to provide service to people who are sometimes marginalized, often abused, and sometimes unclear about where their life is going because they've got into trouble

or because they've had problems in their family, providing a good service for very little money.

These people are trying to buy a house and, as they add up their earnings, realize that it's pretty tough, and they save money. They're saving money. They have a child so they want to make sure that the child is provided for, that basic necessities are provided for: rent, providing for the child, providing for child care, which is expensive. At the end of the day there's not a whole lot of money left to do what you want. This is the couple that would love to be able to benefit from that $2,000 that M. Leach said they were going to save, remember, by eliminating the full-height insulation requirement and the drainage requirement. They would have benefited from that, but there are no savings, so these poor people are going to have to do this on their own or pay somebody else and pay more for that.

This act to promote job creation, this Bill 98, is to require them to take out development charges for soft services, for things such as libraries, recreation centres, community centres, and the money that's supposed to flow to the homeowner ain't flowing. It's not flowing. It's going to flow to the pockets of the big guy. Do you think that's fair? Do you think, mon ami Gilles Pouliot, it's fair?

Mr Pouliot: I would resign, my friend. You and I would resign.

Mr Marchese: Do you think M. Beaubien, mon ami from Lambton, would find it unfair that this would happen with such a bill? Do you believe, Mr Speaker, that somehow M. Beaubien from Lambton would believe this act would promote job creation and the homeowner would save money? Do you believe he believes that? Do you think he read the bill? I often believe the members don't read the bills, because they uncork a bill with champagne every day. How could you read every bill? Did you see the bill that Minister Snobelen presented today? It was this big. As they uncork all these bills, do you think these people keep up to date?

Mr Bradley: Do you think they will be uncorking the champagne in the Albany Club?

Mr Marchese: At the Albany Club, of course. Where else do you think they go? Do you think they go to Dooney's Café at Bloor and Borden? Absolutely not.

Mr Pouliot: Where is the Albany Club? I've never been there. They have.

Mr Marchese: Oh, the Albany Club, they know this place very well.

But I'm worried, because I really want the members opposite to read the bills. There's so much in those bills that affect their constituencies. But do you see how blind they are often when the bills are introduced? They clap like seals and they say, "It's a great bill." I don't think they have a clue what they're reading, if they're reading. I don't think they have a clue, because many do not read. I don't think they have a clue because so many of these bills are passed with such rapidity that their intelligence, as limited as it might be in some cases, can't keep up. They can't keep up.

What is there in this bill that one could say is good? What can I say about this bill, so as not to appear negative, that could be good? I'm desperately searching for notes in this bill that would help me to praise this government. I can't find a thing.

Mr Bradley: I have something for you.

Mr Marchese: Member for St Catharines, I need your help. Please tell me.

Mr Bradley: They will be building new halls to hold their fund-raisers.

The Deputy Speaker: No. Order, member for St Catharines.

Mr Marchese: The member for St Catharines makes a good point to help out, and I appreciate the help. He says they will be able to build bigger halls now so they can have bigger fund-raisers, to have a greater capacity to hold more developers in — is that the case? — so that more and more Tories could benefit from the good work they do for them. That's a good point.

Mr Pouliot: It's a recompense, it's a reward.

Mr Marchese: It is a reward. "I give you something, you give something back." That's a good business practice — the marketplace, eh? Sure. "I help you out and you help me out." That's the way it works in the marketplace. I tell you, the marketplace of the poor doesn't work that way. In the marketplace of the poor there's nothing to exchange except poverty, but in the marketplace of the fat cats there's a whole lot to exchange. Mayor Lastman knows that. N-o-o-o-body is left out of that particular exchange of the marketplace. N-o-o-o-body in the marketplace loses. We all win. The guys that win, however, are the people who've got deep pockets. The poor guy has nothing to share, and why would you share your poverty with others?

This bill, as I see it, had its genesis in a few developers in the Urban Development Institute sitting down together and saying: "Okay, boys, what have we got next? We've got a good friend across the way. Mike Harris is a good buddy. M. Leach is a good buddy of ours. What new idea do we have that we could approach him with, common sense kind of stuff?"

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): A kind of Robin Hood, right?

Mr Marchese: A kind of Robin Hood exchange in the marketplace. They do not hesitate to approach this government, and I tell you, they have no problems accessing this government at all, because in the marketplace money talks. In the marketplace money has power, money gives you access and money achieves results.

This is where I've got to praise Hazel McCallion of Mississauga. She was able to hold back the forces of strength, the forces of capital. You've got to hand it to her, because had she not intervened, we would have had the full weight of this particular bill, where we would have seen municipalities pick up 10% of the hard services and 30% of the soft services. That's what we would have had in the original text of this particular bill. As a result of Hazel McCallion's courageous battle against the mercenaries over there of the ideology of the marketplace —

they would have been stuck with a bill that they would have had difficulties with, and they have shared that with us over and over again.

I had quotes from many of the people who had spoken to this. One of them says that even developers are saying that the benefits of this particular bill are not going to trickle down to the homeowners. I have a person called Hopcroft who said: "The new plan is a serious setback to the relationship between municipalities and governments. We were promised more tools to conduct our business, amid serious provincial cutbacks, and this is a serious limit on that." I had other speakers here that I had quoted in the past, but it is difficult to go through the text and find all that they had to say. But they were all municipal politicians, some of them mayors and some of them connected very much to this government.

I want to speak directly to the general public and say to you that there's always time to be involved in the political process. These bills are opportunities for you to learn about how your community is being affected. It is an opportunity for you to meet with your local member and ask him or her, whatever the case might be, to explain to you the benefits of each and every one of these bills. In this particular case, Bill 98, I urge you to sit down with your member and ask your member to tell you what the benefits of this bill are to you, how this will contribute to making sure you have the infrastructure you need in your community to live a decent human life.

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Ask them direct questions about how eliminating or forcing municipalities to pick up 10% of the cost for libraries and community centres and recreation centres is helpful to you. Ask these provincial politicians to tell you how construction costs for city-administered buildings, parks, museums and art centres, the prohibition of these things, the use of development charges for these things, is beneficial to you.

You need to ask them these questions, and if you are not approaching them, they will feel that what they are doing with these bills is somehow palatable and/or acceptable to you. Without your talking to them, they have a licence to do what they want. You can't allow politicians to have such a licence. You can't allow that.

You can do several things. You can write a letter directly to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister of Finance, and address it "private and confidential" because otherwise it will never get to them. It's true, member for St Catharines. You know; you've been there as a minister. If you don't address it as "private and confidential," it goes to the civil service. Once the civil servants get their hands on that, they've got to read it, they've got to review it and it goes through the various echelons of review, and my God, before you know it, you're out of power and these guys are gone. So don't write a plain letter and address it to the minister, because they're never going to see it. "Private and confidential," this way the political staff of the minister reads your fine words, shares them with the minister and has a good sense of what the public is thinking.

Attend meetings. It's important to attend meetings, at least the meetings that some of these Tories attend, because in my experience not many of them attend meetings. There's a natural fear, quite rightly. These guys are afraid. With all the bills they've been passing, whacking one community and the next, do you think these guys are going to go to the meeting and take a whack from the community? They're not going to do that. They're going to sit home or here at Queen's Park and pretend they're busy. They're going to tell you they couldn't make it to your meeting because they're busy here at Queen's Park.

I tell you, they've got to obligate each and every one of you guys to attend the meetings and be held accountable and explain your bills. If they are not calling meetings and you are calling one and they're not coming, you hold them accountable. They are your public servants and they should be there.

The best approach to these guys is, you've got to see them in their office. They have a duty and an obligation to see you. As elected members they can't tell you, "We're busy and we can't meet with you." Each and every one of us has office hours, including ministers. When we were ministers, we had constituency hours to deal with complaints.

I have heard that some of these guys are not very good at that kind of public accountability, but you've got to hold them accountable. You tell them, "We elected you and you've got to be there." So you've got to have your meeting with them in the constituency office, and I tell you they don't get to see too many people. If they saw 10 or 20 or 30 people either at once or at different times, they would worry. You've got to use your power.

You, as individuals and as a collective, have a tremendous power and you can wield it by using that power you have, by making sure these people explain each and every one of their bills, by making sure that before they come to a meeting, they read their bills.

Some of the people, I must admit, like my good friend from Scarborough East — I tell you he's good. We may not agree with him because he's so extreme in his ideology, but he is good, I will admit to that, my good friend from Scarborough East. He reads, he's up to date, he's profoundly provocative because he believes in the ideology. But at least this man reads.

You've got to force each and every one of these other people, these other Tories to come well prepared to answer your questions. You guys are going to have a hell of a time. You're going to have a hell of time answering some of the questions these people have if they dare to have the courage to hold you guys accountable.

But a politicized society makes for a good human society, and that's what I'm urging the public to do. The politicization of the public is good. A well-informed public is good. It holds all politicians accountable as trustees, as counsellors, as members of provincial Parliament and as federal members of Parliament.

I urge the public who are listening to do that. Bill 98 is not good news and they should be fighting it.

Speaker, I thank you for your attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Questions and comments?

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): I certainly enjoyed the presentation made by the member for Fort York. It was very high in entertainment but rather low in content and facts and figures.

I was really surprised that he talked quite a bit about people with low incomes trying to buy homes and that this bill didn't fit in with that. That's really what this bill is all about: to ensure that development charges are not excessive and to help the very people the member for Fort York was talking about. He seemed to be just a little confused on that particular topic when he was talking about helping people on low incomes. As I say, that's really what this is about.

He was also talking about and insisting on changing it and being more specific and the 10% on soft services. What it's really about is looking at the misuse that's been occurring in the past by some of the municipalities, looking at reducing the cost of homes and therefore increasing the building, the construction of homes, which is something we're seeing right now, and it's also about wanting to stimulate the economy and creating jobs. That may seem just a little foreign, but that's certainly what we're trying to do.

He talked earlier in his presentation about the tax cut, and I don't know how he got so far off topic with Bill 98 to be talking about the tax cut. But let me tell you, this tax cut has been stimulating the economy, exactly what we wanted it to do. It's creating the kind of consumer confidence in the country that was needed. Look at what's happening even to the federal government, that they're now able to get rid of most of their deficit and they are getting to the point of even thinking about doing something with their debt. It's here in Ontario where our tax cut has stimulated the economy to help that.

We're seeing an increase in housing starts, we're seeing jobs up, we're seeing car sales up and we're seeing housing sales up. That is what the tax cuts in Ontario are doing.

Mr Gerretsen: I am glad the member opposite talked about what the federal government is doing, because the federal government is actually doing it right. It's saying there are not going to be any tax cuts at all until we get the deficit down to zero. You people didn't do that, did you? This province still runs a deficit of over $6 billion and you're giving a tax cut at the same time.

You're also talking about the misuse of development charges by the local municipalities. I challenge you and I challenge the minister and I challenge the ministry to name those municipalities. During the hearings this was brought up many, many times, yet the government didn't have the guts to name any of those municipalities. Do you know why? Because there aren't any.

The other thing this government likes to talk about is the balance of things, how to be fair to everybody. We saw a perfect example about how they're not fair in the House today. You may recall that the Speaker who was in the chair during question period made a mistake. He didn't give the government member, the member opposite, an opportunity to put his supplementary question. What did the whole House do, Liberals and New Democrats together? What did we do? We said: "Yes. The Speaker made a mistake. We'll give him the supplementary question."

I then got up and said, "How about giving me my full question that I was entitled to if we had objected to that member having a supplementary question." What did the government side do? What did the Premier say, as a matter of fact? He said, "No, you won't have it."

If that is a system of fairness, that, "It's only fair if you do it our way," I'll tell you something, Mr Speaker: He's got an awful lot to learn about fairness. It's only a minor, little matter that doesn't mean much in the totality of things, but it shows you where this government is coming from. They are not fair to people of Ontario, and that's the bottom line.

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Mr Bisson: I'd like to take this opportunity to comment on the presentation given by my colleague from Fort York. What the member tried to do in his presentation of an hour — I think he was quite successful — was show the links in this particular government decision to remove what we call in our jargon soft services away from development charges.

You can't, as the member pointed out, look at that in isolation of everything else that goes into supporting a community and doing development in a community to sustain what are important services for its residents. I think the member linked that quite well.

The problem I have with what the government is doing is that they really have a shortsighted approach to development. They're saying, "Development at all costs." They're not saying we need to make sure that the development is sound financially and ecologically and also in what it means for citizens. They're saying, "We're going to get rid of development charges and that's going to spur development in communities and that's good for the economy and that's good for Ontario."

It might spur some development. I would question how much, because in a lot of communities it doesn't amount to that much of a deterrent to development. But the problem is that they're offloading the responsibility of the developers on to future taxpayers in that municipality. If, let's say, a development in my community somewhere across the bridge, let's say on Riverside, were to expand by 40 or 50 homes, the soft services aren't going to be picked up initially by the developer. It's going to be all those municipal taxpayers within that particular area in the whole community.

I'm saying the government is shortsighted. They're saying, "Let's give our developer friends a break and let's transfer that responsibility of the developer directly on to the municipal taxpayer." I say that is not only unfair for the taxpayers but in the long run is fairly shortsighted politics, period.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): I'm pleased to respond to the member for Fort York, although it's a bit

troublesome here. We have conflicting rules in this House. We're only supposed to respond to the comments made by the original speaker, not the other respondents. But by the same token, he was supposed to have been speaking to the bill before us here today, Bill 98. He spoke about a lot of other things and, unfortunately, only tangentially dealt with some of the issues arising from development charges. One of those was what the province is doing to help low-income families get into the housing market.

I would remind the member opposite that for the second year in a row we've eliminated the land transfer tax for first-time home buyers. We're doing things that are very substantial. Forget the rhetoric. We are actually making it more affordable.

Let's get back to the bill that's before us here today. The Development Charges Act made it very clear at the outset that this was about making sure there's a fair balance between the costs borne by the developers and the costs that should be borne by the cities. Obviously, if any new development goes in and causes an increase in the extent of the sewers or the sidewalks, the roads that have to be put in, it's appropriate for that developer to pay those costs.

Having said that, currently the municipalities have the ability to assess all sorts of other charges for hockey arenas, for libraries, for art galleries that clearly all the other citizens of the city, the existing residents, also benefit from. We don't believe that's appropriate.

But you know what we did? After hearing from the people of this province on the original draft of the bill that was put out there, we cut from 30% down to 10% the percentage of the soft services that are required to be paid by the municipality. Imagine that. Even though you could have a town of 15,000 people and the new developer comes in with a proposal to add homes for 500 more, he could still be faced with a disproportionate cost of that art gallery or arena. We listen to people and we think it's appropriate the municipality still has some role, but the bottom line is we have got to put in a process that is fair to developers, that stimulates investment and creates jobs in the construction industry in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Fort York has two minutes to respond.

Mr Marchese: I thank all of the speakers who have spoken and will direct my remarks to my two Tory friends on the other side from Northumberland and Scarborough East.

The member for Northumberland talked about looking for content in what I said and commented on the entertainment value of what I said. I looked for the same in him, and I couldn't for the life of me —and I think I'm perspicacious enough to pick it up — see any entertainment, and I desperately looked for content and didn't pick any of that up either. It's funny how perspicacity works.

Both my good buddies from Northumberland and Scarborough East —

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: "Good buddies" — I take that back. They talk about us in terms of how we criticize, but did you hear the propaganda and the rhetoric on the other side? Their speeches are full of it. Propaganda, perfidy indeed and rhetoric, that's all I see in their speeches. Maybe the public sees something else, but I see propaganda, rhetoric and perfidy — full of it.

They say this is going to stimulate job creation. It's going to stimulate the pocket of the developer, and that's all it's going to do. We know that and the public knows that. It will stimulate the pockets of their buddies. They know that. Even developers know that the housing market, who buys and who doesn't, is determined by the market force, not by your development charge. Thank Hazel McCallion for bringing these guys down, because originally they were going to charge 10% of the hard costs and 30% of the soft services to the municipalities. Hazel, thank you for your work.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Galt: It's certainly a pleasure to be able to rise and speak on Bill 98, the Development Charges Act. I enjoyed going around during the hearings and listening to the various presentations, and as a result of those hearings this government was listening and has certainly responded.

The Development Charges Act is very important in connection with growth. We want to see growth in our respective municipalities, so it is incredibly important. Just getting one house built represents one and a half or two person-years or thereabouts. It represents all kinds of work for people in landscaping, in developing appliances and the construction of those appliances, in furniture. There's a tremendous spinoff as we are able to get more housing starts occurring in our country. With the changes in the development act and the way we're working this through, we will see a stimulation of the economy, one that will generate taxes and the kind of finances needed for government services in general.

As I look at this act and read it through — although the member for Fort York suggests that we don't read these, we just turn them out — as you look through it, you'll find that it's going to make it fairer for homeowners. The way he was spinning it off, it was going to hurt them, and in fact really it's making homes cheaper. He seemed to think all it was going to do was help developers.

It will certainly help finance the infrastructure of new development. It's going to help remove some of the obstacles to growth, and that's something that our party has stood for way back before the election, to get rid of some of the obstacles and barriers to job creation and growth in the province. Development charges, as they have been designed and have been working, were a good idea to start with, but kind of went down the road of getting in the way and costing a horrendous amount, and some municipalities ended up really taking advantage of it and overcharging and hurting the people who were moving into their respective communities.

We see in this bill that we're going to be able to stop some of that misuse of the power that was in the hands of the municipalities and was hurting development. We recognize that there's a certain amount of cost in doing business and that development charges are important to

help develop some of those services. Certainly in the past, and now, any capital cost that was related to growth was to help, was to come in to look after that. It was intended to help with some of the hard services, the capital, some of those things such as sewers and water, two very important things that are needed in subdivisions. It was important for roads that would be in the various subdivisions, for transit, for waste management and for homes for the aged. Development charges were intended to help recover some of these costs for these services that were needed for new development.

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However, it went way beyond in charging for some of the soft services — 100% and sometimes more — necessary for new libraries, recreation centres, hockey arenas, parks etc, facilities that were not necessarily connected with the new subdivision or the new community or industrial park. Often these facilities might be on the other side of town, not necessarily connected with that particular development that was going on, although they were ending up paying 100% of the cost for it. Development charges were never meant to be a cash cow for any municipality.

Mr Gerretsen: No, they're not.

Mr Galt: Unfortunately in some instances that's how they did end up, even though the member from Kingston is commenting that wasn't the way. You'd think a past mayor of Kingston would understand some of the things that were going on.

Mr Gerretsen: We didn't have any, Doug.

Mr Galt: My compliments to the ex-mayor or retired mayor from Kingston that they didn't have any there. That's just absolutely marvellous. We're concerned about the communities that were making misuse of these.

We recognize the importance of the capital costs that these development charges do recognize and help with. Currently they are imposing charges that directly relate to growth, but presently these services include benefits that help the entire community. We were referring just a few minutes ago to things like hockey arenas, art galleries, tourism facilities, convention centres etc. There's no question that the taxpayer is expected to pay a portion of these costs. However, evidence points out that these new facilities in the past have placed an unfair burden with the new development charges that were in place. That was just simply unfair. It was stifling things such as construction, it was stifling investment and it was really affecting job creation in general. As I pointed out earlier, new development is tremendously important. It creates jobs and it is indeed the driver of our economy.

This new act will promote the home construction industry and it will indeed reduce the cost of some of those homes. The member for Fort York was concerned about affordability of homes. That's really what this bill is all about: making homes more affordable.

We hope it may also stimulate rental accommodation, something that has been missing for a very long time. It really got started back in the mid-1970s when some new rental agreements came in, bills on rental accommodation that limited the increasing of rent at that time. As a result, rents have been held down and we've ended up with a tremendous lack of rental accommodation in this province. We ended up with a Ministry of Housing and we've been spending something like $1 billion a year just because of the direction that it went. We were just not developing new rental accommodation.

This legislation will certainly reduce the scope of services that have in the past been eligible for financing through development charges. We're proposing in this act that, for some of the soft services, the municipalities will be expected to pay 10%. We're talking about things like libraries, community halls, hockey arenas and convention facilities. The other 90% could come from development charges, but it's not required that all 90% would come from that.

By setting it at this level, it does accomplish two things: First, it ensures that newcomers coming to a community and buying a new home would not have to carry the entire financial burden, as they were liable to do in the past. Sometimes, as mentioned, these new and existing facilities may be found on the far side of town, where everyone is enjoying them, not just those in that particular subdivision. We believe that really all residents should be helping. New residents, it should be remembered, will also be paying taxes down the road and will be supporting these new facilities as they go on and costs are required.

This particular bill will make the whole process far more transparent and it will be easier for those who have to foot the bill to see what's going on and examine it and understand it much better. It will also make councils far more accountable.

Mr Gerretsen: How?

Mr Galt: I'm glad the member from Kingston asked how. They'll be required to carry out studies and take a really hard look at these new facilities, and also they'll be paying the 10% that will make them more justified. There will be more municipal financial involvement, especially with the 10%, and that will get them more involved and more concerned to take a very serious look at it. They will be paying partly for these new services.

Bill 98 will require municipalities to look at a cost-benefit analysis and end up calculating the actual benefit to the community and to the residents who will be using these new facilities.

During the hearings we heard from many municipalities concerned about the contribution for soft services. We listened to those concerns when it was at 30% in the original bill and we adjusted that to 10%. At the same time it had been set for hard services at 10% for municipalities, and we moved that to zero. This compromise indicates the way this government listens and responds to the concerns of the public.

We're not the kind of government that may push things through, like the social contract that the previous government pushed through with no hearings, just drove it through, wiped out all the collective agreements of the province, of the municipalities and of school boards. They just drove it through without listening; no hearings. This

government is one that has hearings and listens and responds.

Let me give you an example as to Who Does What. We had the Crombie study, went out and listened and invited the public and municipal representatives to participate. We listened and we implemented and brought in almost everything the Crombie report recommended. Then we had the transition team sit down and look at it. What did we end up doing? AMO came to us with a recommendation. We looked at it, we could meet our goals, so we said yes to almost everything AMO recommended except the 5% that trustees might be able to continue taxing resident property owners. We said no to that one item, but otherwise we listened and we responded.

More recently, just last week we listened again and responded with some changes to Bill 136. The union leaders came in and met with the Premier and some of the ministers who were connected with that bill. We listened, we looked at it and we responded. We're working with the unions and our goals have not changed. We will still accomplish our goals. We may arrive there by a slightly different route, but our goals are firm and we will arrive at those goals that we intended to reach in the beginning. Our main goal is to eliminate the deficit and reduce the debt that you people started, that you people created and that has caused all kinds of harm to new construction and jobs and the economy in this country.

Mr Gerretsen: You're the ones doing the harm.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Kingston and The Islands, order.

Mr Galt: Mr Speaker, thank you very much for quietening them down and getting a little order here.

Development charges are a real concern to all residents of Ontario, particularly those who are looking for new homes, and also for communities that are poised for growth. Northumberland just happens to be one of those communities that is benefiting from lower development charges, and many of the municipalities in Northumberland have kept their development charges down. As a matter of fact, five months ago I spoke at an economic development workshop in Hope township. There's no doubt in my mind that excess development charges dampen growth and investment.

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Northumberland right now is open and welcomes growth. There are many examples across our riding where growth will be enhanced by looking at these development charges. For example, in Brighton we have a growing retirement community where some 800 units will be developed. In west Northumberland, in the industrial park near the mothballed Wesleyville plant, development is on the move. West of Cobourg, in New Amherst, there is an entire new community-based urbanism model now under way. That's the kind of development that is occurring in the riding right now.

Six months ago, I announced in this House that in my riding, in the town of Cobourg, we had regained over 900 jobs in the manufacturing sector that had been lost during the recession. At that point in time, roughly January 1, we had broken even. This was certainly encouraging news. It also indicated that we were poised to move ahead with greater residential and commercial growth throughout the riding.

In Cobourg, by the beginning of April, building permits were up to $4.2 million. That was up from $1.6 million at that time the year before, almost triple what they were in 1996. In manpower employment surveys carried out, 44% of employers in the construction companies were predicting hiring. In manufacturing companies, some 24% of the employers were predicting that they would be hiring within the year.

Bill 98 will certainly help to encourage new growth and new investment in Ontario. I'm looking forward to that both in my riding and across Ontario. That is why I'm very pleased to support Bill 98.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Bradley: I have found rather amusing the chronology the member has used in talking about the reaction of municipalities. As we know, municipalities in this province are under siege by this government because of the downloading of responsibilities and financial obligations that have been embarked upon by the Premier and members of the cabinet.

At the very time that our municipal representatives require funds to be able to carry out their responsibilities, the Mike Harris government is taking away from them one source of revenue which was quite legitimate to be able to undertake projects which were of benefit and help and necessity to the various municipalities. So they did not hail this bill.

When they got into negotiations with the government, it was the old story of the government starting out with a very hard line. Then, when they get into negotiations and the government backs down on a couple of items, it's in essence similar to saying: "Thank you for kicking me in the shins. You didn't kick me in the face." That's so often what happens when the government is involved in these negotiations.

There is little doubt, despite what the Conservative government member says, that the main beneficiaries of this legislation will be the huge developers in the province. They will be coming in great numbers to the Conservative fund-raisers and saying, "Thank you," with large donations to the Conservative Party. They are a special interest group that is being looked after by this government, and there is no guarantee in this legislation, as the member admitted, that any savings will be passed along to potential homeowners.

Mr Bisson: This was a most interesting speech, I guess you could call it, by the member across the way, who says: "This is a great thing. This government is making changes to the Development Charges Act and it's going to create all this new development in the province."

Let's look at what this government actually did. They started out by saying they were going to remove entirely the ability of municipalities to charge for soft services on developments, so there would be no development charges on soft services.

Because of Hazel McCallion and other mayors who said, "This is utterly preposterous. You are trying to tell us, municipal governments, how to run our businesses," the government finally backed down. The government is now saying, through this revised bill, you can charge everything but 10% back to the contractor, the developer. In other words, if there's a development charge, they can pass on 90% of the development charge right back to the developer, and 10% has to be borne by the municipality.

This is not going to do anything to increase development. Quite frankly, we're standing here debating a bill that, for all practical purposes, who knows what it's really going to do? What they originally wanted to do was make municipalities pay the entire cost of soft services. Now, because of the intervention of mayors and others in this House, they are in a position where they can still pass on up to 90% of soft development charges to municipalities.

So who are you trying to kid? This bill is going to do absolutely nothing to help development happen in this province in any way, shape or form, because in the end it is still the status quo. The only difference is that they can pass on 10%.

The last point: The member across the way says municipalities were misusing this power. What a thing for a government to be saying about municipalities in this province. It's pretty sad.

The Acting Speaker: Time has expired. The Chair recognizes the member for Scarborough East.

Mr Gilchrist: I'm indeed pleased to respond to comments made by my colleague the member for Northumberland, who, unlike the previous speaker, stayed on topic, and unlike the previous speaker decided to more accurately reflect on what exactly is happening in the province of Ontario, both in this chamber and outside, the investment that's being made by the hardworking people of this province.

We have heard far too often opposite that we don't consult, that we don't listen. This bill is a classic example of exactly how much the government does consult and listen to the affected groups, whether municipalities, developers or people who just were looking forward to buying a home. The bottom line is that a number of very specific, concrete suggestions were made, and they're reflected in the final version of the bill that's now going forward for our consideration in third reading.

The bottom line is that, as the member mentioned, whether it's Bill 136 or this bill or Who Does What, in every case this government has set a track record. Contrary to the mythology that the opposition tries to create, the facts support the argument that we have been listening and we have been responding better than either of the two previous governments. Whether it's Bill 136 —

Mr Bradley: Sound the bugles of retreat.

Mr Gilchrist: The member opposite derides the fact that we listened to labour and we've responded now. You go through labour's alternative. We've made those suggestions, appropriate amendments to Bill 136. But even more appropriate, we had 720 hours of hearings last year. The NDP in their record year had 689. The most the Liberals ever sat was 529 hours, 200 fewer hours of public hearings, the same year that they rammed through 93 bills. In all of 1996, we just passed 10; in other words, 72 hours per bill for the Conservatives, five hours per bill for the Liberals.

You talk a good line in here, but the bottom line is that both of those two parties demonstrated they didn't listen to the people. That's why they were judged the way they were June 8, 1995.

Mr Gerretsen: I must say to the last member, in those days that you were talking about, there were no restrictions on debate. So there must have been some pretty good bills to allow them to go through in a much shorter period of time.

What I want to talk about, though, is the total inconsistency. We heard the member just say that municipalities can't be trusted because they may be using some of the developers' money for museums, for rinks and for other projects. They can't be trusted, and therefore they've got to be limited. Now, they're only going to be limited by 10%, which, as the other member has already indicated, is really a very small amount in the total development framework etc.

On the other hand, they're saying municipalities can be trusted, because we're downloading all these other services on them. We want to download social housing on them. We want to download the health unit costs on them. I know of no other health costs that are actually borne by local municipalities. We want to download policing to municipalities; no more policing grants. You may recall, Mr Speaker, I spoke to you last week about a municipality that actually got a bill for $60,000. They haven't seen a policeman in the last year or two, and yet they're being charged with it, one of the smallest municipalities in Ontario. What else are they downloading? They're downloading ambulance services, which have never been dealt with by municipalities.

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You can't have it both ways. You can't on the one hand say, "We don't trust you as far as development is concerned, but on the other hand, here, we want you to pay for all of these services now." Why don't you listen to the mayors of this province who are saying, one and all, that the downloading is going to cost more on the property tax base in this province? Rather than stonewalling them and rather than saying it's revenue-neutral, say the right thing, and that is that you are downloading extra costs on the local taxpayers.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. We're in debate. There are comments and questions; there are replies. I want your replies put in that format. If you have the attention of the Chair, then you'll be standing up in your place, and that's the only time you're supposed to be shouting, talking and making noise.

Mr Galt: I'd certainly like to thank my seatmate, the member for Scarborough East, for his very kind comments.

It's interesting he also noticed the criticism from the opposition. First they criticize that we're pushing something through and not listening when in fact we are, and then when we listen and respond, they say we're backing down and chickening out. You just can't have it both ways. We either do one or the other, and I think we're hitting a very comfortable happy medium.

We're listening to the public, we are responding, but we are heading out and going to meet our goals. That's really what it's all about and what's important, the kinds of goals that we established in the Common Sense Revolution, brought out a full year before the election. The election could have been much sooner if they'd gone on the traditional four-year time, but they dragged it out to almost five years.

Mr John L. Parker (York East): What did they do in the fifth year?

Mr Galt: Nothing. I think they sat for three weeks, just a few days, and basically nothing happened legislativewise except they ran up a big debt.

It's interesting how they got sidetracked on to so many different things. I heard the member for St Catharines talking about us kicking somebody in the shins. I think they were kicking people in the face when they were in, because what happened there is they doubled their spending, doubled the budget in the 1980s, when times were pretty good. That's when they should have been paying down some of the debt. Then what did the NDP do in the following government? They doubled the debt. Between the two of them — talk about getting kicked in the face — they increased taxes 65 times in 10 years. That's what you did: increased taxes 65 times.

When you talk about downloading, don't forget that the public has pleaded that we take the education tax off residents. We did, we took it all off, and then we responded to the municipalities. When AMO came to us, we said: "Okay. If you would prefer it this way, we'll go 50%." Don't forget also the $570 million that's been set aside, annualized, for hard-hit municipalities.

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired. Further debate?

Mr Bradley: I want to begin my remarks by congratulating the member for Welland, St Catharines and Thorold, the Honourable Gilbert Parent, for his re-election to the position of Speaker of the House of Commons. Gib Parent is the Speaker of the House of Commons once again, and I want to compliment him on that because I know all members would want to join me in doing so.

I have found amusing, first of all, the various comments of members of the government. I listened to these bulldogs — I use that very kindly — on the other side who talked about how tough they were going to be, how difficult they were going to be, how they were going to stay the course, how they would never back down. And indeed those of us in the opposition said: "You know, you should start out doing something right in the first place. Don't unnecessarily provoke people. Don't move too quickly. Don't move too drastically. Look at the consequences of your actions." The government continued to bulldoze and bully people around the province until they hit the skids in the polls. Then all of a sudden we see a major change on the part of the government.

I listened last Thursday with absolute astonishment as the Premier got up and denounced the union bosses, as he called them, said this government was tough and standing firm, said his government was in a new era of relations where the public sector employees had to understand certain things. He reminded me of Phineas T. Bluster. That was a character in the Howdy Doody show of years gone by when I was a little wee kid. Mr Bluster was a person who was all bluster. He was all wind. He was all huffing and puffing. I saw Mike Harris, Premier of Ontario, get up at his blustering best and denounce the union bosses.

I thought Mike Harris was going to stay the course, just as the citizens' coalition asked him to. I thought he was going to stand firm, as the taxpayers' coalition were urging him to do. Then, all of a sudden, I heard the Minister of Labour get up and almost totally capitulate, though we haven't seen the details yet, to the demands which were made by, as the Premier would call them, the union bosses, and as we would call them, the elected representatives of working people in this province.

One could hear the bugles of retreat being sounded. One could hear the beeping sound as the truck backs up, as it's in full retreat. I was happy to see that, but I wish it were motivated by something other than a dive in the polls. I wish it were motivated by the fact that the government recognized it was wrong in the first place.

The battering that the government was taking day after day from my Liberal colleagues and members of the third party obviously had some effect. Obviously the government knew that it was making militant people who are not normally militant, people who did not want to go out on strike, people who wanted to concentrate on the jobs that they had, on serving the people of this province, on working with the students of this province. I think at last there was a recognition of that. It was late. It was a conversion on the road to Damascus. It was very late coming, but better late than never. You could add to that, better never late.

So we come to this bill on development charges and I hear the government say, "The real purpose is to help people who want to purchase homes, so we're going to cut the cost for them." Yet I look in the bill and I find no provision that would require the developer to pass along that cost which would have been incurred by the kind of development charges that municipalities have been imposing for very good reasons.

I suspect that any savings will go into the pockets of the developers and a certain portion into the coffers of the Conservative Party. The big developers are going to have to say, "You know, we are a special interest group and we're going to have to thank this government." "How can we best thank the government?" the big developers will say. They'll show up at the big fund-raising dinners all around the province. In St Catharines they were overflowing at the Ramada Parkway Inn. You couldn't get

near the place, I'm told, for developers and others for whom the government has done favours: deregulating, reducing environmental requirements and so on. I thought from a straight point of view of fund-raising, this was good; good public policy, however, it wasn't.

But I understood at least why this bill was being brought in and I know when it's finally passed we will be able to hear the tinkling of the glasses at the Albany Club as they gather together to celebrate this victory over regular folks in our province, this victory of the developers. They will be thanking them at the Albany Club with the Conservative members.

What does this bode for the province? I remember the municipal affairs minister in Ottawa making a speech — and I know all of the environmentally concerned supporters of the Conservative government, all 12 of them, will be saying they were shocked at this — where he said, "I want to see fewer whooping cranes in Ontario and more construction cranes." I'm very concerned when I hear this; not surprised, but very concerned when I hear this. I begin to see unfettered development taking place. Good development everybody wants to see, I assure members of the House, but I see it happening all around the province in the way it shouldn't. I see prime agricultural land being converted into development in this province.

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There are places for development, places where the agricultural land is not prime, places where the soils are not conducive to growing good food, places where the climatic conditions aren't special to growing certain crops. But the big developers want to get into the prime farm land.

If you look at the Niagara Peninsula, there are members of this government who would like to see everything paved from the edge of Metropolitan Toronto, Etobicoke west to Niagara Falls and Fort Erie, paved completely, taking away farm land which could serve to assist people in the future for the growth of vegetables, for the growth of fruit, for the growth of food for people in our province. Instead, there are people who want to pave that farm land.

We in the Niagara Peninsula have as an attraction a good deal of rural land, something that is good for the peace of mind of people, something that is attractive to tourists in our province. We used to see this throughout the Niagara Peninsula. Now we have development, we have the paving of the farm land, we have asphalt farmers in many places.

Some of the beauty of the Niagara Peninsula has been lost. Some of the attractiveness which brings my friend Bill Saunderson down to the peninsula on many occasions — he's a frequent visitor — is being lost as new developments are proposed. In fact, tonight St Catharines city council is dealing with a development on prime agricultural land. It started out as an autoplex they wanted to build. Now it's a different development.

Is there a place for development? Yes, in the city itself, within the urban boundaries there is still room for development. The land has been allocated for that purpose. Yet we're seeing people who want to pave that farm land. As soon as you allow certain developments to take place, it multiplies.

I feel bad for people in the town of Queenston, where there is a huge proposal for further development to destroy the character of that town. The town of Niagara-on-the-Lake council is opposing this and the regional municipality of Niagara is opposing this, but there are people who want to develop all that and make it look more like it's in the middle of Metropolitan Toronto, where we expect development, rather than on prime agricultural land.

You are taking away from the municipalities, through this bill, an opportunity to gain some funds to carry out their responsibilities. Heaven knows they will need this money, because you have downloaded responsibility, as the mayor of St Catharines has said as the chair of the large municipalities — and he has said it in much more diplomatic terms than the mayor of Mississauga, who is much more direct in indicating what this government was doing. My good friend Don Cousens, former Conservative member for Markham, now the mayor of Markham, has denounced this government for its downloading. They are saying: "Look, you are placing new financial responsibilities and obligations on our municipalities. At the same time, you are taking away our opportunity to levy development charges which legitimately contribute to services that are going to be required in greater numbers because of new development taking place."

We see user fees taking place now as well, being imposed. I was talking to people in the all-star hockey realm just yesterday. I said, "What will it cost somebody to simply step on the ice now?" They said it was $900 simply to register. Why is that? Because the user fees are going up. The children of rich people will be able to participate, will be able to take part, but other people will not. In our Ontario, I suspect in the Ontario of Bill Davis —

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): Mr Grimmett doesn't believe you.

Mr Gilchrist: Neither does Mr Gilchrist.

Mr Bradley: In Mr Grimmett's and perhaps Mr Gilchrist's Ontario, that may well be acceptable. It certainly wasn't in the Ontario of Bill Davis and Bob Welch and Tom Wells and Roy McMurtry and the late Larry Grossman and other icons of the Conservative Party from years gone by.

We are seeing in the Niagara Peninsula a situation where we have unique soil conditions and unique climatic conditions. For instance, the difference between the top of the Niagara Escarpment, which is under assault, by the way, and the bottom of the Niagara Escarpment is on the average 27 more growing days, 27 more frost-free days, so special products, special crops can be grown at the bottom of the escarpment. Yet we see development taking place and money being made hand over fist on these developments by the large developers.

People will be asking, "What about rent control?" A lot of seniors and a lot of others don't know that this government is also removing rent control. That will help to enhance the attendance at the fund-raisers in Ontario as the huge developers are able to up the rents substantially for

people out there, well beyond what would be anticipated to be fair, as a result of a bill that is sitting before this Legislature. I wonder how many of those senior citizens who might have voted Conservative because they found some of the Conservative Party attractive will today be in favour of having their rents increased drastically, as the rent control bill will ensure will happen.

I want to share some of the progressive thoughts that are forthcoming from individuals on these development fees. Hazel McCallion said: "We can't afford to let development go ahead. We don't wish to go into debt. We're managing our finances extremely well and we take exception to the interference by the province into the revenue of the municipalities."

There are others who have had certain comments to make that I think are equally relevant. The critics argue the changes to the charges will encourage costly, land-munching urban sprawl and make new development less sensitive to the environment.

"Now we're back to the situation where we're going to have all those cookie-cutter housing developments with no controls on them," said Kathleen Cooper of the Canadian Environmental Law Association. "It's incredibly wasteful," she said, and I agree.

"Developers won't have to pay as much towards additional municipal services when they erect new housing, but the net result will be more subdivisions with large houses and wide lots requiring longer roads, water lines and sewers, making people more dependent on cars," Ms Cooper predicted.

"We're going to see developments in areas that never should see development: in wetlands, in natural areas," warned former Toronto mayor John Sewell.

What they basically said is that anything can happen anywhere. As for making some energy conservation features optional, environmentalists say they'll require furnaces to work harder and pump out more greenhouse gases.

In a report for the government-appointed greater Toronto task force, economist Pamela Blais said, "Sprawl can be costly, forcing taxpayers to subsidize much of the infrastructure for new suburbs." She recommended increasing development charges for building on the outskirts of urban areas.

Here we have what the real purpose is: to make the developers happy and to increase the money coming into the Conservative coffers from the developers. That's the real purpose of this legislation. Otherwise, as you know, Mr Speaker, better than anyone, there would be a clause in this bill which would say, "All reduced charges will go back to the home buyer." If they put that in the bill, at least we could say we knew what the purpose of the bill was. As it is, it is a bill that attacks municipalities, that makes developers happy and that will call for one thing. One thing will happen, I say, because it will be 6 of the clock soon and I'll have to continue my remarks later, but one thing I want to say is that it will start one building boom, and that is, the building of brand-new and bigger halls in which we will hold the Conservative fund-raisers, because there are going to be so many developers wanting to come to the fund-raisers, they'll need bigger halls to be able to accommodate them.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): It now being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 23 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 23 septembre 1997

The House met at 1329.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HÔPITAL MONTFORT

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott et Russell) : J'aimerais porter à l'attention du ministre de la Santé deux incidents qui sont survenus récemment dans ma circonscription.

Tout d'abord le cas de M^me^ Thérèse Martin de Rockland, qui a fait un arrêt cardiaque et qui a dû être réanimée à plusieurs reprises par les ambulanciers. Dès son arrivée à la salle d'urgence de l'hôpital Montfort, tout le personnel médical affirmait que M^me^ Martin n'aurait pas survécu si le transport par ambulance avait été prolongé d'une dizaine de minutes pour se rendre à l'hôpital général d'Ottawa.

Le 17 août dernier, M^me^ Cécile Labrèche de Clarence était impliquée dans un accident sur la route 17. Lors du transport par ambulance vers l'hôpital général d'Ottawa, la condition de M^me^ Labrèche inquiétait parce qu'elle souffre d'angine. L'ambulancier qui se dirigeait vers l'hôpital général d'Ottawa a dû modifier son parcours afin de se rendre à la salle d'urgences la plus près, soit à l'hôpital Montfort.

Dans ces deux cas, Monsieur le Ministre, il est possible que les deux patientes ne seraient plus de ce monde s'il avait fallu prolonger le transport par ambulance d'une dizaine de minutes pour se rendre à l'hôpital général d'Ottawa. À la lueur de ces faits, je demande donc au ministre de la Santé de reconsidérer la recommandation de fermer la salle d'urgences de l'hôpital Montfort.

NORTH BAY DAYS OF ACTION

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): Today is the second day of the North Bay Days of Action and organizers say that we are poised to see the largest demonstration ever in northern Ontario on Saturday.

Lana Mitchell, who is one of the co-chairs and who also heads up Low Income People Involvement of Nipissing, expects a large turnout of people from North Bay. As she says: "Our neighbours know at first hand that the community of North Bay has suffered devastating losses. Already, requests to the Santa Fund are far ahead of what they were last year. Food bank usage is increasing every month. This community knows we have to recognize some unpleasant realities. It will turn out in large numbers."

The organizers have also made a real focus on unemployment and job loss in North Bay. Dawson Pratt, one of the other co-chairs, indicates that over 1,000 jobs have vanished because of this government's policies. The North Bay population is 56,000. If a proportionate number of people lost their jobs in Metro Toronto, almost 43,000 people would be jobless.

Pratt has called on the government to set up a select committee or a provincial inquiry to look into the devastation of jobs and the job loss in the Nipissing area. I think we can agree with him and say that if this same degree of job loss occurred in Metro Toronto, an army of 43,000 unemployed would certainly get the government's attention.

We support them in their call for a provincial inquiry and we'll be there on Saturday to show that support.

GREATER PETERBOROUGH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): Today I rise to inform all members of this House that the city of Peterborough has declared this week the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce Week. This special designation is a reflection of the important role the local chamber of commerce plays in our community. The chamber and the community have long had a close working relationship, and this week that partnership will develop further through a series of week-long events.

Computer workshops involving participants of the Student Connection program have been scheduled. Students from Trent University and Sir Sandford Fleming College will provide local businesses with training in how to use the Internet to expand their businesses: Good for business, good for students.

Later in the week, the chamber will host a special business awards reception to honour individuals who have experienced successes in one form or another.

The Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce is involved in many positive initiatives, everything from charity fund-raisers to working on initiatives to improve working conditions through the Safe Communities project, which is a program designed to reduce workplace accidents and injuries: Good for workers, good for business, good for government.

I invite all members to join me in congratulating our local chamber of commerce and all its members for the positive contributions they have made to the people of Peterborough.

ASSISTANCE TO FLOOD VICTIMS

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I rise today once again to speak about the plight of the flood victims of Essex and Kent counties. On numerous occasions in past months I've stood in this Legislature and asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs to assist the citizens of Essex county who experienced property damage in the millions of dollars.

Once again, I ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs why he is sitting on his hands when he knows the situation is critical. The threat of fall storms and high lake levels further damaging breakwalls is now a reality. What is the minister waiting for? Is he waiting for the residents of Lake Erie and Lake St Clair to suffer further property damage?

This situation can be rectified right here, right now, if the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would simply move to reinstate funding to the Shoreline Property Assistance Act. As I've stated on various occasions, we're not talking about a handout. It's not a grant, it's a loan. Why this government has refused to assist the citizens of Essex is difficult to understand. They've offered no explanations for this delay or refusal of responsibility.

Premier Harris, if your minister still refuses to take action, I call on you to personally intervene in this situation in response to the lack of support the shoreline property owners have received to date so that damaged property and breakwalls can be repaired promptly. The citizens of Essex need the help of their government now. Again, I urge the minister to provide assistance that is required immediately.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): Yesterday we saw the Minister of Education unveil his latest attack on our school system. He, of course, put it as he usually does, in a context very different than what the reality out there is going to be. He talked about the need and the wish to increase the school year, the need to give parents more authority through the increase and expansion of the rights that they have through the parent councils. But we know and people out there know that what this is all about is cutting another $1 billion out of our school system.

I want to tell the Minister of Education and I want to tell this government that people out there are not fooled by the antics of this government and certainly not by the approach taken by the Minister of Education. Last week I was at a meeting in my constituency at one of the high schools in the area, Oakwood Collegiate. Two hundred parents and students joined the teachers at a meeting to discuss what was coming up, the impending teachers strikes that we may see across the province and certainly here in Metropolitan Toronto.

Overwhelmingly, people there understood that what this minister and this government are doing is an outright attack on our school system. They see that if teachers are forced into a strike position, it will be because the government will have forced them into such an action and it will be because teachers will be defending not their own pocketbooks but the system of education that we have built up in this province, which certainly can be improved but will not be improved and will be wasted even more so by another $1 billion —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Statements.

ERNIE LAROCQUE

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa-Rideau): I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the MPP for Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry and East Grenville to pay tribute to one Ernie Larocque, who is a constituent of Noble Villeneuve. Officer Larocque is here in the members' gallery today. He became the first Canadian ever to win the annual international truck inspection competition held this year in Minneapolis, Minnesota. What this means is that Ontario has the best enforcement officer inspecting trucks and buses in North America and, more importantly, he's working out of the ministry office in Cornwall.

Our government has been a tireless advocate for road safety. In the past two years we've introduced legislation that targets unsafe trucks and drivers. However, it's people like Officer Larocque who have to conduct these inspections, making certain drivers have proper papers, that their tires and brakes are in working order. Knowing that we have someone of Officer Larocque's calibre working on our behalf should be a source of satisfaction to all Ontarians.

Before this 20-year veteran of the ministry could compete internationally, he took top spot in both the eastern region and the provincial championships. In Minneapolis he went head to head against 52 other inspectors who had earned the right to be there representing Mexico, the United States and Canada's other provinces. The rigorous testing included three one-hour written exams on vehicles, drivers and dangerous goods, a personal interview and inspections of a trailer, motor coach, cargo tank and a driver and rig carrying dangerous goods.

Back home, on a typical day Officer Larocque —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

Interruption.

The Speaker: Although the public members in the gallery are out of order, I'll presume there's unanimous consent to allow them to stay. Agreed? Agreed.

1340

KIDNEY DIALYSIS

Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): It has been over a year and a half since the Minister of Health announced that dialysis treatment would be available in Cornwall.

Since then, there have only been delays, mixups and confusion.

First, it was revealed that the provider selected was involved in legal proceedings in the United States, launching the ministry into its own court battle. Though the court proceedings are now over, and so supposedly the end of a 30-day waiting period, local patients and their health officials are still uncertain if and when the facilities will be set up.

Residents in my area are asking: "Are there any outstanding legal issues? What are the proposals on the table?" — and most importantly — "When exactly will the facility be set up and treating patients?"

The people of the greater Cornwall area, the patients, their families and health care representatives are tired of the minister's standard reply, "as soon as possible," and have requested meetings with the minister or his staff. These answers are needed now. Winter conditions are fast approaching.

ONTARIO HYDRO

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): Most Ontario citizens are aware there are problems at Ontario Hydro. Ontario Hydro itself has said that a recovery plan to make its nuclear division safe and efficient will cost up to $8.8 billion.

This Legislature has created a select committee, under the able chairmanship of Derwyn Shea, to examine Hydro's problems and, more specifically, its recovery plan for its nuclear division. In the middle of this activity there appears in our major daily newspapers this morning full-page ads with a very large picture of a very serious Bill Farlinger, CEO of Ontario Hydro.

So while Ontario Hydro has an $8-billion problem, they still have enough money to run a public relations campaign, for what purpose I can only guess.

As well, Mr Farlinger states in the ad, concerning his recovery plan, "I will be outlining that plan to the government's select committee very soon." Here we have the CEO of Ontario Hydro referring to the government's select committee, not a select committee of the Legislature but a government select committee. And you wonder why we wanted an independent inquiry.

Mr Farlinger has already determined that he will be outlining the recovery plan to the committee. Says who? Who invited him? Not me. I guess things never change. Ontario Hydro still think they run the government.

OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I rise to address the House today regarding a recent event that took place in my riding of Oshawa. On Saturday, September 13, over 25 representatives of the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Sanitation Supply Association, or the CSSA, participated in Operation Clean Sweep.

Every year on the same weekend representatives from the chapters in each province or region choose a non-profit location to perform their work. Here in Ontario volunteers came from all over the Golden Horseshoe to assist.

This year Operation Clean Sweep was held at the Oshawa YWCA in downtown Oshawa. The YWCA in Oshawa provides supportive housing and recreational programs for women and children in the region of Durham.

This is the third year Operation Clean Sweep has assisted non-profit organizations by donating supplies, physically cleaning entire buildings and providing free supplies and equipment for use throughout the entire year.

With its 170 members in Ontario and provincial chapters in Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Atlantic Canada, CSSA provided volunteers and participated in this year's Operation Clean Sweep.

One of the youngest of the volunteers at the Oshawa YWCA event was little three-year-old Taylor, who worked as hard as she could for this year's project in Oshawa.

I would like to thank the Canadian Sanitation Supply Association and its dedicated volunteers for stepping up in our community and making a valuable contribution, as well as all those who participate in events such as these in all our communities every day.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTIONS

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that Mr Cullen be substituted for Mr Miclash on the standing committee on government agencies; and that Mr Caplan be substituted for Mr Brown on the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: Under the provision of the new rules which have been imposed on this Legislature by the government, I gave you notice of the fact that I would be raising an issue. I have to give it an hour ahead of time, at least, so that you have some time to contemplate it, and so the opposition won't raise as many of these motions, I'm told. Anyway, it's in regard to government advertising.

The last time that I rose on this I was dealing with a pamphlet that the government had been involved with involving education. This is the million-dollar campaign where the government is spending a million dollars worth of taxpayers' money to convey what I consider to be a blatantly partisan message. But I'm talking today about the tape of the advertising that everybody sees on television now and that all taxpayers are paying for to the tune of over a million dollars.

The wording of the script of the ad tells me that the Minister of Education, I guess it would be in this case, because it's his ministry that is putting out the ad, would be in contempt of the Ontario Legislature with this advertising campaign because it states that the government is implementing a plan and part of that plan issues regulations dealing with class size. The script clearly reveals that. I took advantage of the opportunity to look at the script of this ad.

Interjection: Oh, oh.

Mr Bradley: The member from Wellington Dufferin-Peel says "Oh, oh," and he's right, because it is rather condemning.

Here's what the actual script of the ad says: "The government is implementing a comprehensive plan to ensure that our children can compete with anybody in the world. It includes more emphasis on the basics, limited class sizes...." If we look at the compendium that comes along with this bill, it makes a point here that it empowers the Lieutenant Governor in Council to issue regulations related to class size.

The ad conveys the distinct impression to people who wouldn't know that the legislation is not necessary, that somehow this is a foregone conclusion, the government is going to implement this and the Legislature doesn't seem to have anything to do with it.

Earlier you made a ruling and I'd like to quote from that ruling because I think it applies in this particular case. You said the following on January 22, 1997, Hansard, page 6442:

"However, I am very concerned by the ministry pamphlet, which was worded more definitely than the commercial and the press release. To name but a few examples, the brochure claims that 'new city wards will be created,' that 'work on building the new city will start in 1997,' and that 'the new city of Toronto will reduce the number of municipal politicians.'" So you are familiar with that ruling.

"How is one to interpret such unqualified claims? In my opinion, they convey the impression that the passage of the requisite legislation was not necessary or was a foregone conclusion, or that the assembly and the Legislature had a pro forma, tangential, even inferior role in the legislative and lawmaking process, and in doing so, they appear to diminish the respect that is due to this House." That was specifically dealing with that pamphlet. "I would not have come to this view had these claims or proposals — and that is all they are — been qualified by a statement that they would only become law if and when the Legislature gave its stamp of approval to them."

You went on to say that "the wording and circulation of the pamphlet appear on their face to cross the line. I say in all candour that a reader of that document could be left with an incorrect impression about how parliamentary democracy works in Ontario, an impression that undermines respect for our parliamentary institutions."

1350

You went on to say, "At this point in my ruling, I want to express some personal concerns about the propriety of public funds being used to advocate, through advertising, a particular position on a matter that is before the House. Let me be clear: I am not speaking here about politically paid for advertising, but rather about funds that are contributed to by every Ontarian, regardless of his or her political view. Personally, I would find it offensive if taxpayer dollars were being used to convey a political or partisan message. There is nothing wrong with members debating an issue and influencing public opinion; in fact, it is part of our parliamentary tradition to do so. But I feel that it's wrong for a government to attempt to influence public opinion through advertising that is paid for with public funds."

What I want to zero in on, because I think it applies to this particular case with this particular item that I had in my hand a minute ago, which was a tape — and I have the tape in my hand again — is that the minister is in contempt of the House because he has suggested clearly that no approval of this House is required for him to implement the plan. That is clearly what is stated in this particular piece of advertising, and I contend that the member is in contempt of the House for that reason.

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, clearly the government and the Ministry of Education have a broad objective of improving the education system in the province of Ontario. I think if we continually get into this nitpicking of trying to find some connection —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order.

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I am really sorry I showed up today. I never heard the like of it.

The Speaker: The member for Kenora, come to order, please. Government House leader.

Hon David Johnson: They seem to be a little sensitive today. If the idea is to grind everything to a halt so that anything that has a remote connection to any bill that's in front of the Legislature —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon David Johnson: There may be a number of ways the class size could be dealt with. One of the ways may be through the bill that was introduced, but there may be other different ways of dealing with the class size. There is no reference that I'm aware of to any bill. There's no presupposing any bill is passed, any particular legislation is passed. I fail to see what the contempt is.

I think the allegation is that the member for St Catharines is indicating that the minister has assumed that some particular legislation is passed when the House has not yet dealt with it, but I fail to see that in what he has stated today. What he stated today includes a broad message from the government in terms of improving education. I think it's clear that class size is a concern to those who are involved in the education system, and there may be a number of ways of dealing with the class size.

The Liberal government, when it was in power, advertised to the tune of $13 million, the NDP $13 million. There is a requirement —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. If both sides of the House would come to order to get this point of order dealt with, I'd appreciate it. Government House leader.

Hon David Johnson: There is a requirement to communicate to the people of Ontario about a topic as important as education. I'm sure all governments have done this. I'm sure that the previous government did it, that the Liberal government did it. The facts in terms of the advertising communication budget point out that this government does less advertising than any of the previous governments have done over the last 10 years. Nevertheless, there is the requirement to communicate on education, on health care matters, to the people of Ontario. This is just a regular form of that communication, not presupposing any particular legislation is passed, and I would submit certainly not in contempt of this Legislature.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): The government House leader in his intervention has betrayed the very attitude we're concerned about. His attitude seems to be that the processes of the assembly, the introduction and passage of pieces of legislation, is somehow picayune, that by raising concerns we are nitpicking. That's not the case.

The point is, Speaker, that my friend from St Catharines has raised this matter on the basis of a previous ruling by you, as Speaker, with regard to, not the volume of advertising but the content, that is, what does the advertising say? In this particular case, the videotape indicates the government is going to limit class size. The government House leader says there may be other ways of dealing with limiting class size, but —

The Speaker: Order. Can the House come to order. If there are meetings that need to take place, I wish they'd take place outside this chamber — down at the end, there. Thanks very much. I'm sure it's an important meeting. I'd appreciate it if it could take place in the lobby. It's difficult to hear the member for Algoma.

Mr Wildman: The government House leader indicated there may be other ways of dealing with class size limitation. That indicates the government House leader isn't aware of the current situation. Currently, matters of class size, pupil-teacher ratio, are subject to collective bargaining between school boards and teachers' federations. The government of Ontario does not have any way right now of limiting class size. The Minister of Education and Training introduced a bill yesterday that would give him the power to limit class size, but that bill has only gone through first reading. It has not yet come before the House for debate at second reading or for anything further in the process, a process the government House leader seems to think is somehow picayune. We don't believe it to be.

We understand the previous ruling by you, Speaker, that the House is important, that the role of the legislators is important. The fact is the government can't claim to do something that is pending if legislation is passed because the government then assumes the legislation is going to pass and does not take into account the role of the Legislature, which may in fact not pass the legislation or may change it in some way through amendment. So the advertising in our view is indeed a contempt of the process.

The Speaker: I'll take care to review the video now that I've heard the arguments and report back, more likely tomorrow.

1400

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Education and Training. I have a question which goes to your integrity and credibility. Last week you assured parents and students alike that the threat of a strike caused by your attempt to remove or tamper with the right to strike was no longer there, that you had addressed it, and specifically you addressed it through your legislation introduced in this House yesterday. Parents of course hoped that this would mean peace throughout the land, that they wouldn't have to worry about your relationship with teachers because you would have fixed everything up.

I took the opportunity to read some of the fine print in your bill and I noticed on pages 50 and 51 that you have given yourself and cabinet the power to "prevent disruption in the education of pupils." What that means very clearly to me, Minister, is that you have retained for yourself the right to interfere with strikes. You told teachers that wasn't on, but apparently it's back on. Why are you trying to sneak your agenda through?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I believe that if the Leader of the Opposition were to think back for a moment, he'd always find that in the past in this Legislature parties of all three political stripes have had the ability to order teachers back to work when a strike jeopardized the school year of a student. That power remains in this legislation. It remains under a jeopardy ruling currently held by the ERC. This legislation continues the Education Relations Commission in that function. That will be unchanged by this legislation, because I think all three parties have agreed in the past, and I believe most people in Ontario would agree, that there's not an unfettered right to strike, that that ends with the right of a student to get an education and complete their year of studies. That continues just as it has been.

Mr McGuinty: Let's go over this wording, because I think the exact wording is very important. You say in here that you retain for yourself "in such transitional matters as the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary or advisable in connection with the school system reforms of 1997-98, including, but not limited to, regulations providing for such matters as the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers advisable to prevent disruption in the education of pupils."

The reason that teachers were on their feet and were prepared to go to the streets was because you were threatening to interfere with their right to strike during the transitional phase. You said that was no longer on, that everything was okay, to go back to the classrooms and settle down and that parents need no longer be concerned. I've discovered a provision in this bill of yours which does precisely what you said you weren't going to do. Once again, Minister, why are you trying to sneak in something through the back door?

Hon Mr Snobelen: That's simply not the case. We made an announcement some six months ago now that we would have a fair funding model, that we would make sure that we had funding for this transitional year that would protect all of the existing programs and services and the contracts between teachers and their boards in this school year which takes us through the transition period. We obviously have protected those contractual agreements that are in place now.

I said last week, and I meant what I said, that we would not with this legislation —and it does not — interfere with the teachers' right to strike. These are the same kind of rights and privileges teachers have enjoyed under previous legislation; however, it has been improved.

If the Leader of the Opposition will read through the legislation, he'll find that we've answered some of the concerns of teachers with regard to bargaining contracts, so they can be done in a more timely manner. We put teachers into the Labour Relations Act, which will help them have their disputes handled in a way that's much more expeditious than the way it has been under Bill 100. I think the Leader of the Opposition will find that we have not only lived up to our commitment of last week, we've actually improved the climate for teachers in the province.

Mr McGuinty: You've got — and this makes it perfectly clear — a serious credibility problem when it comes to improving education in Ontario. You said you weren't going to touch the right to strike. The fact of the matter is that you have done that. You said you weren't going to cut classroom funding; you did that. You cut junior kindergarten, you cut special education, you cut adult education in Ontario.

There have been all kinds of media opportunities for you to address one particular fear and concern. You have said that you are intent on removing another billion dollars from education in Ontario. Here is your chance right now, Minister. I want you to stand up and I want you to tell us that you will not remove any further money from education in Ontario.

Hon Mr Snobelen: In direct response to the matter, if there's a credibility gap here, it's with the Leader of the Opposition.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member for Kenora, come to order.

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): He could have said yes —

The Speaker: Member for Oakwood, come to order.

Hon Mr Snobelen: He brings up a section of the bill that deals with ensuring that students in mixed-language schools don't lose their rights when the boards move to either English- or French-language programs. That's what the intention of that part of the bill is, and he brings it up as if it were some override of strikes. Let me say again very clearly, we have protected that right for teachers in this legislation.

As for the funding model, I can tell the member opposite this. It's our intention to have the funding of our students in the province of Ontario meet their needs for a first-class education. We won't tie it to the broken programs of the past that were tied to the assessment of property. We'll tie it to their needs. That's what we're doing right now so we can guarantee a quality education for every student in the province.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I'd like to introduce, in the government members' gallery, Lorna Fitzsimons, member of Parliament in Britain for Rochdale and chairman of the PLP Women's Group. Welcome.

New question, leader of the official opposition.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My next question is for the Minister of Health. I understand that he is on the way.

The Speaker: Okay. Leader of the third party.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Education and Training as well. Yesterday the minister said his government was taking another step in their comprehensive plan for education. But there's a large hole in this comprehensive plan. It doesn't have a budget. He refuses to make the funding formula available.

I want to ask the minister this: We already know that your cuts to our children's education are hurting classrooms, and your own Education Improvement Commission said to you that any money that is found through restructuring should be reinvested in our schools, should be reinvested in our children.

I want to ask the minister, will you commit today to reinvesting in our schools, in our children's education, any money that is found through your legislative changes or through your school board restructuring changes? Will you commit to that?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): The leader of the third party may want us to tie our funding of education to an old system of funding that everyone who has examined it has found wanting, that has made second-class students of some of our young people in Ontario by virtue of their being underfunded, a model that was tied to the property value of homes and businesses in a community instead of the needs of students in that community. That's what the leader of the third party would like us to tie our funding to.

We think we should have a blank page. We think you should start with the expert panel reports on what our

students need, what it'll cost to meet those needs, benchmark those needs and then make sure that every student in Ontario has enough funding for a quality education. That's the approach we're taking. The leader of the third party would like us to stay in the old broken funding system. We think it's time to change that to meet the needs of the students in the province.

Mr Hampton: This is bizarre. The government claims to have a comprehensive plan for education, but they refuse to make the funding formula public. They refuse to tell the people, and most of all the children of Ontario, what the funding formula is. Minister, this is not about property tax values; this is about whether you're prepared to make a commitment to reinvest any money that is found in the educational system, to reinvest that money in our children, in our schools. That's what it is, pure and simple; nothing more, nothing less.

We believe you want to take $1 billion more out of our children's education. That's why I put to the question to you. Will you commit that any money that is found through your legislative changes, through your school board restructuring changes, will be reinvested in our children, will be reinvested in our schools?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let me make it clear to the leader of the third party what we are doing. It's called "consulting"; it's called "asking the experts in education what it will take to make sure every student in this province has a first-quality education." That's what we're doing. It's a process we have been engaged in for some months now. There are a lot of people working very hard at doing just that. We intend to listen to their advice and we intend to build the right funding formula. In the interim, we're guaranteeing the quality of education for our students. We're guaranteeing that during the transition there'll be no withdrawal of funding. We've already made that promise.

But let me be clear to the leader of the third party: We do intend to cut. We intend to cut administration duplication; we intend to cut politicians; we intend to cut waste and duplication. We intend to increase teaching time; we intend to increase our students' performance. That's the whole purpose of our reforms.

1410

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): The minister, despite his rhetoric, is not prepared to tell us in dollars what he is going to invest in education. He won't tell us what his budget is. He doesn't have a fiscal plan apparently.

Parents don't want you to take more money out of education than you have already taken. You have already taken too much. Kids are doing without classroom supplies, textbooks. They're having to pay fees to provide the basic supplies for certain courses.

Is the minister prepared to make a basic commitment, without any rhetoric, that whatever moneys are found, if any moneys are saved through the various things he said he intended to do, all the dollars will be reinvested in the classrooms for the students of Ontario?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I want to tell the member for Algoma that I had a chance as late as last night to listen to the concerns of parents. I went to a parents' meeting to listen to what they had to say last night. I think they had the same —

Interjections.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Thank you.

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): You stole the money, Minister.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Well, you know, I've heard a few people tell me you can't say that, but it has been said in the past by your Premier, accusing Mr Laughren from Nickel Belt of stealing the northern development moneys.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Nickel Belt, I was not suggesting that; I was just pointing out that there were accusations made in the past.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I appreciate that half-hearted apology, but I really must insist that you withdraw that.

The Speaker: Let me qualify the withdrawal.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I certainly withdraw.

Hon Mr Snobelen: To the member for Algoma: Parents are concerned that we meet the needs of their students. That's their primary concern. They are very pleased we have curriculum now in place that sets out standards year by year. They are very pleased we have a common report card across the province. They are very pleased we have measures for their student performance so they can find out what is going on.

I made those parents last night the same promise I have made parents across this province, the one I intend to be held to account for, and that is at the end of the day, our funding won't be tied to property value, it will be tied to their students' needs, and we'll have enough funding in this allocation model to meet the needs of their students, not tied to the past but tied to their needs in the future, a system designed for their future and for the future of the province. That's our commitment.

PAY EQUITY

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): My question is for the minister responsible for women's issues, and I noted she was here. Is she returning?

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): She is scheduled to be here. Go ahead.

Mr Hampton: Minister, two weeks ago the Ontario Court of Justice ruled that your government's attempt to take away $400 million in pay equity payments from the lowest-paid women in Ontario violated the Charter of Rights and the Constitution of Canada. Last week the Premier said something very alarming about this, and I think I can quote him here. He said that the government was moving ahead with implementation of the court order but that Ontario will not be providing funding to the broader public sector employers involved. In other words,

he said the associations for community living and nursing homes and so on that are out there should make the pay equity payments, but the government isn't going to pay them.

I want to read a section of the judge's ruling for you. He said: "To continue the proxy method of paying pay equity without government funding would send large numbers of the employers of these women into bankruptcy. These employers depend on government funding." Will you commit today that the government is going —

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister.

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for women's issues): In response to the leader of the third party, I think he knows this is an extremely serious issue and that we have taken time to consider our alternatives, because all the alternatives are extremely serious with regard to the fact that we have a challenge with the Minister of Labour and the Attorney General and the Premier. We will seriously consider a fair solution.

Mr Hampton: This is about the so-called fair solution that the Premier was talking about in the press. I want to quote the judge again. This is what the judge said:

"To continue the proxy method of paying pay equity without government funding would send large numbers of the employers of these women into bankruptcy. These employers depend on government funding for their very existence. Any increase in pay for these employees must be paid for by the government."

Your Premier is out there saying these community organizations who look after the poor, who look after the vulnerable, who look after people who are developmentally delayed, these people who do good work, who look after the elderly, should just pay the bill, and he refuses to commit that your government will pay. The judge said in his judgement, if that's the route your government follows, literally thousands of these women will lose their jobs and our communities will lose valuable services.

I put it to you, are you going to pay or are you going to force some of these valuable community employers into bankruptcy and force these women —

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: In response to the question once again, I think it would be very unfair to send the message out that anybody is going to force our community agencies into bankruptcy. That is an extremely irresponsible statement, number one.

Number two, I would like to respond in this way. I've already stated that the Attorney General, the Minister of Labour, myself for women's issues, the Premier and others are seriously considering a fair solution.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): Minister, I can tell you right now you should read the press clipping. It was your Premier who put that message out there, not a member of the opposition. We're responding to what your very own Premier said. He's scaring people out there. He wouldn't commit to the government funding this.

Let's go back to the judge's ruling and let's be very clear. It says, "It should be emphasized that without government funding, pay equity in the broader public sector could not be achieved or maintained." That's pretty clear. He says that to implement his decision without full government funding for pay equity, "would send large numbers of the employers of these women into bankruptcy."

Minister, let me remind you again we're talking about some of the poorest-paid women in Ontario. We're talking about child care centres, nursing homes, women's shelters and many other community organizations. I want to give you an opportunity again. Stand up and say that at the very least you will fight in your own cabinet to make sure the government stands up for these women and puts the money in towards pay equity.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: The government has to make a decision in this regard. We want to make a fair decision. I think the member knows that we are looking for that decision and I think I've answered the question today. I'm not going to answer on behalf of all of my colleagues in the House at this moment, but you will get a response.

1420

SPEECH PATHOLOGY

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): My question is for the Minister of Education. Last year almost 20 speech pathologists were eliminated from Ontario schools and school boards. Today parents of children with autism are here in the gallery. You'll see them here in yellow T-shirts. They're cycling across Ontario to raise awareness for their children with autism.

Their children are some of the children we know are falling through the cracks with your cuts to schools. This week, speech pathologists are releasing a report that shows that this year there will be even fewer speech pathologists. These parents are at their wits' end and some, like last week, take their children to Thistletown and say, "We need your help."

Minister, autism is a communications disorder and communication is critical to learning. What will you say to these parents in the gallery today?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I'll refer this to the minister responsible for community and social services.

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): Don't you know about special ed in school? That is pretty disgraceful.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Lawrence, come to order, please.

Mr Cordiano: That is pretty disgraceful.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): These kids don't belong in a classroom. That's what he's saying.

The Speaker: Member for Lawrence, member for Sudbury, come to order, please.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): I had the privilege of helping the local chapter of the Autism Society kick off its fund-raising campaign this weekend. I would like to congratulate them

on the work they are doing to raise the profile of this particular disability that some children suffer with.

It's one of the reasons this government was very pleased to announce earlier this year that we will be doubling the number of children who will benefit from speech and language support in the education system. We know and recognize that this is a very important support for those children, especially in those early ages. I'm also pleased to know that the Minister of Education has recognized the need to ensure, in future funding of schools, that special education is included.

Mrs Pupatello: These are more examples of announcements where money does not actually flow into the programs to help these children. You, Minister, who went to help them at a fund-raising campaign, are missing the point. You're the very government that is taking these services away.

In the gallery today we have Claudio Del Duca, a father of two sons with autism. One of his children, Gabriel, is losing his speech pathology in his school this year. It started this September, your Minister of Education cutting speech pathologists from school boards, your ministry announcing money that never flows to actually help the children.

What we need to tell you is that we're talking about real people. We're talking about Gabriel. We believe Gabriel has every right to reach his full potential. Your own government is making these cuts that affect these children. Minister, please, when you respond, talk to Claudio Del Duca. What can you tell him now that your government has taken his speech therapy away?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The first thing I would tell this individual in the gallery is that he might wish to be careful who he listens to in terms what is actually happening out there. This government has not reduced those services.

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Ecker: I would like to reiterate that we have not slashed special education funding; we have not slashed those services. In effect, we are increasing the spending for speech and language. We are putting that money in the community based on the recommendations of district health councils and other community-based groups. I'm sure the honourable member would like us to continue to consult and listen to them. We know that resource must be directed, as much as we can, for intervention and prevention.

One of the reasons this government is taking the authority in school and education that we are is because when school boards sat there and had a choice of what they were going to hit, isn't it interesting that one of the most sensitive services, one of the services that those children need so much —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Windsor-Sandwich, member for Hamilton East and member for Oriole, come to order.

Mrs Pupatello: The minister doesn't have it as a mandated service.

The Speaker: Member for Windsor-Sandwich, I'm not going to warn you again. Come to order.

Hon Mrs Ecker: We know that service is very important for those children. We have encouraged those school boards to continue to fund that. We are allocating, as I understand it, that special education is something that needs to be included in funding for education and we are continuing to support that service.

The Speaker: The leader's question, the leader of the official opposition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Minister, if there's one thing that people are saying about this government, of course, it is that you're moving too far, too fast. This applies particularly when we're talking about hospital closures in Ontario.

You've closed three in Ottawa — the Riverside, the Grace and the Montfort — and you have decided that those are going to close in 1998. Every year 23,000 surgical operations are performed in those three hospitals. Those 23,000 operations are going to have to be performed at the Ottawa General Hospital. The problem is, we're closing those three in 1998 and the Ottawa General Hospital won't have the new facilities built to accommodate those 23,000 patients until the year 2000.

My question of you, Minister, is quite simply: Where should these 23,000 patients go? To those operating rooms which will have been locked or to those which have yet to be built?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): It should be obvious to the honourable member and everyone else that if the construction isn't completed within the time lines as directed by the commission, then the patients obviously will stay where they are.

There's one rule in all this: Overall services are being enhanced, not cut, in the Ottawa restructuring report, as in all the restructuring reports. Common sense dictates that the honourable member should be able to answer his own question, and that is that if the physical space isn't available, then nobody will move anywhere. The commission has set time lines because they want people to aim for those targets, but they are experts, including friends of many of the health care providers in Ottawa, and they realize and will know, as we move forward, what's feasible and what isn't feasible.

The fact of the matter is, to say that people will go into limbo might be the way the Liberals were planning to run the health care system on a $17-billion budget, versus our $18 billion, but that's not the way we're planning it.

1430

Mr McGuinty: This comes as news to the Riverside, the Grace and the Montfort because they've been issued very clear orders. As of June 30, 1998, they are to be shut down, no ifs, ands or buts. They are over, there is no more business and all their patients are to go elsewhere.

You should have seen this coming, Minister. The Ottawa General Hospital in its very own report submitted to your commission said, and I quote: "Even more critical than the capital investment required is the timetable for all this work. We submit that critical care areas such as an expanded emergency department, surgical suite and intensive care unit could not be made available prior to the end of the year 2000."

They told you up front. Why are you putting patient care at risk? You have said very clearly that three hospitals have to be shut down in 1998. The new accommodation will not be available until the year 2000. Once again, where do these 23,000 surgical patients go? Should they go to those operating rooms which have been locked up or go to those which have yet to be built?

Hon Mr Wilson: The honourable member is taking a very strange position on restructuring when it is of net benefit to his community. I guess he wants to deny the people of Ottawa the new technologies, the nursing home beds, the long-term-care services. Where exactly are you on restructuring, Mr McGuinty, today? Are you in favour or are you against it? That's what I want to know.

Mr McGuinty: If the minister wants to know whose side we are on, he should understand very clearly that we are on the side of patients. We are on the side of quality health care in Ontario.

Tragically, this is all part of a pattern that has been emerging for some time as a result of this minister's breakneck —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Kitchener, can you come to order, please? And Ottawa-Rideau, can you come to order as well? I can see you there, yes. No matter how far you slouch down, I can still see you. I appreciate everybody is seeking help all the time. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Let's come to order, please. Leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, you're going too far, too fast. Everybody outside of this place recognizes that and understands that and you're putting patient care at risk. It's as simple as that. We've heard stories like this in London, Toronto, Windsor and now in Ottawa. By moving too quickly, you're putting patient care at risk. We're not talking about a corporate reorganization here or shutting down a plant in order to retool. You're talking about patients who are going to need surgery; 23,000 will be without surgical units for two years in Ottawa. What are you going to do about it?

Hon Mr Wilson: That is simply ridiculous. The honourable member is making up something hypothetical that I'm sure doesn't come from his community. His community is very much working on restructuring. We're still waiting. We're on the time lines.

I don't know where the question comes from that he made up. First he says we're going too slow and we won't have the operating rooms, the six more operating rooms that Ottawa will get in addition to what they have today. He says we're moving too slow. Now in the final supplementary he says we're moving too fast. He totally makes up the question. It doesn't come from any facts. I'm doing my very best to answer a ridiculous question.

I remind the honourable member that we're still waiting. In all of these restructurings with Metro, London and Ottawa, everyone has till October 9 to answer the 45-day response period the commission put out for community reinvestment, so we don't know what the final tab is yet.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I have a question for the Attorney General regarding his continued mismanagement of the family support plan. On May 9, fully five months after this Legislature passed Bill 82, you finally proclaimed part of the bill. You announced that you would begin testing the suspension of driver's licences and that this enforcement tool would be fully in place by September 1997. You said, "The testing of the suspension of driver's licences will begin immediately to ensure a smooth and full implementation in September of 1997."

We have learned that your driver's licence suspension project is not up and running, and when you finally begin testing, you are only going to test 100 drivers who are in arrears. Minister, you broke your promise to women and children. Once again, why can't you do anything right with respect to the family support plan?

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I'm very pleased to hear by the tone of the member's question that she is now in favour of driver's licence suspension. I note that when it was proposed to her government some five or six years ago, it was rejected out of hand, otherwise it would be up and running today and maybe we wouldn't have a billion dollars' worth of arrears in the family support plan.

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): Totally false.

Hon Mr Harnick: The leader of the third party says, "Totally false." I'd invite the leader of the third party —

Interjections.

Hon Mr Harnick: Mr Speaker, I note that the leader of the third party says that's not true. I invite the leader of the third party to speak to Mothers Against Fathers in Arrears and Families Against Deadbeats and find out from them that they were turned away when they made that suggestion, that it was dismissed out of hand. As a result of that, they ran a family support plan that had no ability to collect money. They didn't even have a plan that considered self-employed people as part of it. They couldn't even get the definition of who had to make payment in the plan correct. Their plan was —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Supplementary.

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Back in December the parliamentary assistant, speaking on behalf of the Attorney General, promised the people of this province that implementation of the key enforcement tools will begin by the end of January. This Attorney General soon afterwards promised that the suspension of driver's licences will become effective in September 1997.

The only thing the people of this province can rely on from you is your continued incompetence. The fact is, not a penny has been collected in over nine months as a result of the passage in this House of Bill 82 — not a single penny of moneys in arrears. Just what is it about your incompetence that has prevented you from getting a single enforcement tool, any one of the 10, operative in the course of almost 10 months?

Hon Mr Harnick: I can tell this House that we will be years ahead of that party in terms of implementing real enforcement techniques to the family support plan.

Interjections.

Mr Kormos: If you tell the truth, people won't have to say that, Charlie.

The Speaker: I warn the members for Sudbury East and Welland-Thorold to come to order. I'm not warning you again. The member for Cochrane North.

Hon Mr Harnick: They left a legacy of a billion dollars owing to women and children.

Quite simply, we are developing a plan that will have real enforcement techniques. I appreciate they'd like us to be able to go faster. If they really wanted to go faster, these are the kinds of things they had an opportunity to implement when they were the government. Unfortunately, they rejected it out of hand. They were happy to rack up deficits of $100 million —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Fort York, would you come to order. I ask the third party members to come to order, please. I can't hear the minister's answer. I've warned the member for Sudbury. I've warned the member for Welland-Thorold. Member for Fort York, come to order.

Hon Mr Harnick: As I was saying, they did not want to implement any enforcement measures that would successfully collect arrears owing to women and children. They were quite content to run a plan that had $100 million of debt going into it every year. They were familiar with —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members, I'm trying my best to maintain control.

Interjection: It's not very good.

The Speaker: Who said that?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mr Harnick: As I was saying, this was a party that, when they were in government, rejected these things out of hand and were quite content and comfortable to rack up $100 million a year in debt owing to women and children. They were quite pleased to do that and to reject suggestions to really collect money out of hand.

1440

MUNICIPAL ENUMERATION

Mr John L. Parker (York East): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Interjections.

Mr Parker: I know the opposition is going to be very interested in hearing this question and the answer to it, so I invite them to pay close attention.

Minister, with the municipal election approaching soon —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Would the opposition please come to order. Thank you.

Mr Parker: There are many subjects I would like to address, but on this particular occasion, I want to discuss an item that was in the paper yesterday. It suggested that enumeration by the mail-in-ballot system was low. That's a concern to me, with the election coming up soon, and I know it's a concern to my friends opposite. Minister, could you explain to the House just what the method is for the mail-in enumeration and what steps this government has taken to improve that system?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'd like to thank the member for York East for his very, very good question. As this House is aware, before every election a mail-in enumeration is done by the Ministry of Finance to update and create a new voters' list. These forms were mailed to 5.2 million households in Ontario between April 28 and May 9 and a very extensive advertising campaign was done at that time to encourage the people in all the municipalities to return their forms and register as soon as possible. The information is then checked by all the municipal clerks. It's provided by July 31 for the clerks to check for errors.

On September 2, the voters' list was made public so people could check to see if their names were on the list. The accuracy of the list is always a concern in an election year and we're encouraging every individual to make sure their name is on that list.

Mr Parker: I've received a few calls from people who are concerned they may not get their material in the mail in time and they might miss the deadline for getting their enumeration on the record. What process is in place to ensure that these people can in fact become enumerated and exercise their democratic right on election day?

Hon Mr Leach: Again I thank the member for his very good question. Any citizen can check to see if their name is on the list by calling, phoning or going to the office of the clerk of their municipality. If they're not on the list and they are there, they can have their name put on the list immediately they're there. They have to take with them a couple of pieces of identification showing their address, where they live, and also a piece of photo ID so the clerks can have that information and make sure they are on the list. Even if they don't do that, and we encourage them to do that, any citizen who shows up to vote and their name does not appear on the list can have their name put on that list right up to 8 o'clock on election day by showing, at the polling booth, proper identification. That's a photo ID and something that shows their address.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My question is to the Minister of Labour. Last Thursday in your statement to the House you told this House you were backing down on major components of your legislation, Bill 136. Although you haven't released the actual amendments you'll be making, you have suggested what amounts to a major rewrite of the bill; in effect, you've gutted the bill. In my opinion the bill will be out of order, because if you are true to your word the heart of the bill has been changed. It will not be the same bill at all and it won't be the same bill this House passed at second reading.

Minister, the right thing to do would be to withdraw Bill 136 and bring forward some new legislation for everyone to see. Will you do so?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): I would tell you that the bill with the changes will still enable the government to meet its objective, and that objective is to ensure a very smooth restructuring as we go through the changes that are being anticipated for the municipalities and the school boards and the hospitals. We will at the end of the day still be able to provide better service at less cost to the taxpayers. The legislation, Bill 136, will still enable us to move forward because certainly the changes we have made will still retain the essential elements of Bill 136.

Mr Patten: Minister, you are reported in the Toronto Sun, "The hearings will provide people with the opportunity to respond to the amendments we have proposed." Those are your words, that people will have a chance to respond to the amendments. How can they do that if you won't release the amendments before the end of the hearings? No one will know for sure what the wording of your amendments will be.

Based on your statement last week, the two commissions which form the backbone of the bill are gone. The restrictive measures of the right to strike are gone. Fair and impartial arbitration is gone. What's left?

Minister, what are you afraid of? Why won't you table those amendments? You know that if you don't table those amendments before, it makes a mockery of the hearings. What are they going to respond to? They'll have nothing to respond to other than the verbal commitments you've made, with no specifics in terms of legislation. Why won't you table those amendments?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Last week I very carefully indicated the major changes the government was making that would still enable us to reach our objectives. We responded to all the concerns that had been put on the table, not only by the OFL but by some of our other stakeholders. We made it abundantly clear that there was no restriction on the right to strike. We also indicated that the Labour Relations Transition Commission would no longer exist and that its responsibilities, the provisions that commission had, were going to be transferred to the Ontario Labour Relations Board. We also indicated that the provisions of the Dispute Resolution Commission were going to revert back to the private sector interest arbitration.

I'm not sure what it is the member doesn't understand. However, it had been clearly enunciated last week and we are continuing to provide information.

1450

CHARITABLE GAMING

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Last night, North Bay city council passed a bylaw, and that bylaw said no to charity casinos and video lottery terminals for the next year until an impact study is done, a study they say your government should have done before you started forcing these casinos on communities. This is the Premier's home town that has said no to your casinos and your video lottery terminals. We can put that together with communities like Belleville and Barrie and Brantford and many others which have said no.

Your colleague is telling the operators that within 45 days of the announcement of the short list they've got to have their sites in place and it has to be up and operating next year. Community after community is saying no. Shouldn't you back off, ask communities who wants to host these, match proponents with communities, do the proper impact study? Minister, would you approach this in a rational way and stop jamming these things down the throats of unwilling communities?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the member for her question. It's probably more appropriate to go to my colleague; however, in his absence I will advise the member that we have a list of willing-host communities. All of the charity gaming casinos are going to go to willing-host communities, which only makes sense; those that want them will get them.

As the minister has stated before, the province doesn't intend to force a charity gambling parlour on anyone. If a municipality chooses not to have them, they don't have to have them. If they have them now, the roving, uncontrolled casinos that are creating quite a problem with control, they must be cognizant that they are going out of operation on March 31. So if charities in their communities get money from the roving ones now, they might want to consider very carefully saying no to a permanent one that would have full controls.

Ms Lankin: I heard that threat, and I hope everyone in this province heard that threat. This minister just said that if those communities don't go ahead with these casinos, their charities are not going to get any money. I'm glad it's on the record, because we said that's the threat you're holding over communities.

Minister, community after community after community is saying no to your charitable gaming casinos and video lottery terminals. Why don't you back off this plan you're rushing ahead? You've got proponents lined up whom you've told they have 45 days to get the site, that the site has to be in one of the designated communities. The desig-

nated communities are saying no. It's a shambles. You've rushed ahead. You don't understand the consequences of the way you've approached this. Minister, please, rethink this, ask what communities want it, match them up with the proponents, take a rational approach.

Hon Mr Leach: I thank the member for the question. She just repeated everything I said. I said we have a list of willing municipalities that want to have the permanent charity casinos, that have asked for them, and they're the communities that are going to have them. It will be the local council in those communities that votes to say, "Yes, we want a controlled casino." Any community, any municipality, as the minister has publicly stated, that states they do not want one will not have to have one.

In my earlier remarks I was trying to ensure that the communities recognize that the existing roaming casinos, which are totally uncontrolled, will be going out of business as of March 31 next year. I think they should all be aware of that.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, you recently announced that 218,908 people have stopped depending on welfare since this government was elected in 1995 and over 9,000 people left Ontario's welfare system in August alone. Would the minister indicate how York region's and Durham region's welfare figures compare to the rest of the province?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): I'm very pleased that both York and Durham have followed the provincial trend. As you know, we've had a 16% reduction in the number of people trapped on welfare across the province. What we've seen in York is that there's been a reduction of some 25%. That's 3,473 cases of individuals who no longer have to rely on welfare. In Durham region, it's a 21% reduction. That's 4,700 cases who no longer have to rely on welfare.

The honourable member for Windsor-Riverside was objecting to this question yesterday. I looked up the figures for Windsor and I am pleased to tell her that there is a 26%, almost 27% reduction in the general welfare caseloads in the community of Windsor. We are seeing very good reductions across the province and we know those individuals are getting off welfare and into jobs, the majority of them. That's where they want to be and that is certainly what we are doing to ensure that it happens.

Mrs Munro: Considering that both regions have experienced such a dramatic drop in the welfare rolls, can the minister tell us how taxpayers in my riding of Durham-York will benefit and how local businesses can get involved to ensure welfare numbers continue to decline?

Hon Mrs Ecker: While we've seen savings across the province, I am pleased to report that in the community of York they have seen a saving of $4 million in the last two years and in Durham it has been a saving of $10 million. Those municipalities are putting those savings to good use, ensuring that services are there.

We also know that many private sector organizations have been willing to support and want to get involved in our work-for-welfare program. Of course one of the rules is that we do not displace paid jobs; that would be defeating the purpose of this. But they can, and many are, supporting programs that community agencies are doing. My parliamentary assistant, my colleague the member for York-Mackenzie, has been out in the communities meeting not only with the business community to explain to them how they can support it, but also with the community agencies, and we're very pleased with the response.

LAKEVIEW NURSING HOME

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): My question is to the Minister of Health. Last Thursday afternoon you told the House that we had an obligation in government to pay particular attention to the care of mental health patients in Ontario. With that appropriate observation in mind, I want to ask you a question about the future of the Lakeview Nursing Home in the village of Cobden in the county of Renfrew.

This home was built nearly 30 years ago to provide for a number of adult psychiatric patients who were or had been discharged from Kingston and Brockville. Ten weeks ago you were specifically requested by the current owner of the Lakeview Nursing Home in Cobden to accede to a transfer of that licence from Cobden, Renfrew county, to the Oakville-Burlington area of Halton region.

Minister, can you tell the residents of Lakeview and their families that you will deny that request for the transfer of the nursing home licence from Cobden to Oakville-Burlington?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I thank the honourable member for Renfrew North for bringing this issue to my attention on several occasions, both personally and in the Legislature and through correspondence. He has also, because he is a very good member of the Legislature — there's a good reason why he's been here for so many years — met with ministry staff.

I think he knows or should know very well that it's not the intention of the ministry to see that home closed. Through the good work of the local reeve, Dave Stewart, I think we perhaps have some interested new owners of the home or purchasers who will take over the licences from the current owner. I can assure the honourable member that if arrangements can be made at the local level to keep those licences in Cobden, the ministry will give its concurrence.

Mr Conway: The families and the residents of that home will very much appreciate what the minister has had to say. One of the problems we've had in Renfrew county is a dearth of mental health services. Lakeview is really the only facility we've got in the county that provides for the special needs of these very special needs people, who came to us from Kingston and Brockville.

Minister, can you indicate when you expect to make a decision on the Lakeview matter?

Hon Mr Wilson: We will make the decision, I can assure the honourable member, as quickly as possible after we've seen a proposal. Our hope, his hope I think, and certainly that of the community, is that someone will come forward and purchase those licences, take over the operation of the home. We'll see a new operator. The honourable member is right that many of those residents have special needs. I think seven of the residents have actually lived in the home for about 15 years.

They are long-term residents who do have special needs, and my understanding from the honourable member is that the needs are being met very well in those homes. If all goes well, we hope that someone will buy the home and that the residents won't see any change. I don't think they deserve to be upset after so many years of calling the Lakeview Nursing Home their home.

1500

SPEECH PATHOLOGY

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. I listened intently a little bit earlier to your response to a question that you got with regard to speech pathology programs, and you stated in this House that your government was not cutting one dime, not one sou, from speech pathology programs in Ontario. Minister, you're wrong. In our community of northeastern Ontario, in Timmins and across the north, we're losing the entire budget for the dollars utilized to pay for speech pathology programs for healthy kids under the age of six.

Your doing that means that none of the kids in northern Ontario under the age of six is going to have access to any government-funded speech pathology program, and what's worse is that the moneys that you announce for new additions to speech pathology are predicated on our having existing programs. If we lose our program, we're not able to build up on top of it.

Will you please talk to the Minister of Health and fix this problem so we don't lose speech pathology programs for people in northern Ontario?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): I'd be quite pleased to convey to the Minister of Health whatever message the honourable member would like.

One of the things we have certainly acknowledged is that speech and language support is extremely important, especially for those children aged zero to six. That's one of the reasons we have increased funding for it. We announced that in the budget. That's one of the reasons that money is flowing through a community-based planning process to those communities. It's my understanding in the joint cooperation on this between health and community and social services that we're actually going to be able to double the number of children who will receive the service. I'd be quite pleased to look into this for the honourable member.

PETITIONS

VIDEO LOTTERY TERMINALS

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The issue is arising again. I have a petition to the government of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Since video lottery terminals will contribute to gambling addiction in Ontario and the resulting breakup of families, spousal and child abuse and crimes such as embezzlement and robbery;

"Since the introduction of video lottery terminals across Ontario will provide those addicted to gambling with widespread temptation and will attract young people to a vice which will adversely affect their lives for many years to come;

"Since the introduction of these gambling machines across our province is designed to gain revenue for the government at the expense of the poor, the vulnerable and the desperate in order that the government can cut income taxes to the greatest benefit of those with the highest income;

"Since the placement of video lottery terminals in bars in Ontario and in permanent casinos in various locations across the province represents an escalation of gambling opportunities;

"Since Premier Harris and Finance Minister Eves were so critical of the provincial government becoming involved in further gambling ventures and making the government more dependent on gambling revenues to maintain government operations,

"We, the undersigned, call upon Premier Harris and the government of Ontario to reconsider its announced decision to introduce the most insidious form of gambling, video lottery terminals, to restaurants and bars in the province."

I affix my signature, as I am in complete agreement with the sentiments contained in this petition.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I feel the number of petitions coming from northern Ontario with regard to speech pathology programs as the response I just got from the minister. None the less, we have other petitions, and these are from a number of people in northern Ontario. I have some couple of hundred signatures here, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to restructure completely the provincial-municipal relationship without having consulted the people of Ontario; and

"This restructuring proposes to download to municipalities the cost of transportation and such critical social services as welfare, long-term care and language-speech pathology for under-six-year-olds;

"Removes school boards' ability to tax, eliminating any effective local control of schools and school programs;

"The government's actions fail to guarantee existing levels of funding and failure to recognize the unequal ability of local communities to bear the cost of these new burdens, thus producing inequalities of access to the people of northern Ontario;

"Whereas the government's lack of meaningful public consultation and disregard for public response pose a serious threat to democracy;

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, because we care about the quality of life in our province and the wellbeing of our children, neighbours and communities, register a vote of non-confidence to the government in the province of Ontario."

I affix my signature to that petition.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 24 people. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass a bill empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

TUITION FEES

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Conservative government has cut funding to St Clair College; and

"Whereas these funding cuts have caused hardship on senior citizens by increasing the costs for their programs by more than 400%;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all college programs, be they education or recreation, remain affordable and accessible to senior citizens."

I join with the hundreds of constituents of mine who have signed this petition and affix my signature to this petition.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It says:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Fort Frances ambulance dispatch not be moved to Kenora."

This has been signed by close to 100 residents of Fort Frances and the area. I affix my signature to it as well.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): I have a petition signed by about 71 of my constituents. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas communities strongly disagree with allowing women to go topless in public;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To enact legislation to require women to wear tops in public places for the protection of our children and for public safety in general."

I'll sign it so that it becomes a permanent record of this House.

TFO

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott et Russell) : J'ai une pétition adressée à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

«Attendu que TFO appartient aux Ontariens et Ontariennes ;

«Attendu que le gouvernement de Mike Harris a fait fi des sentiments de la population qui veut le maintien de la propriété et du financement public de TFO en tant que diffuseur éducationnel en soumettant TFO à un examen concernant sa privatisation ;

«Attendu que le gouvernement de Mike Harris n'a pas indiqué que la population participerait à part entière à l'examen concernant la privatisation ;

«Nous, soussignataires de cette pétition présentée à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario, demandons la tenue d'une consultation publique ouverte et honnête auprès des Ontariens et Ontariennes avant qu'une décision sur l'avenir de TFO soit prise.»

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition from my home town of Hamilton to the honourable Minister of Environment and Energy and the Premier of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

I proudly add my name to those of these citizens.

ROCK MUSIC GROUP

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I'm pleased to present two petitions, one from Marie McClurg and the other from Gail Laflamme. They read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the rock band Marilyn Manson was permitted to play a concert at the Ottawa Congress Centre on Friday, August 1, 1997; and

"Whereas Marilyn Manson's wilful promotion of hatred, violence, immorality and obscenity has been linked to teen suicides and adolescent crimes across North America; and

"Whereas by allowing Marilyn Manson to perform, the Ottawa Congress Centre, a crown agency with a public mandate, helps to legitimize the band and its unethical messages; and

"Whereas the Ontario Court (General Division) has ruled that Marilyn Manson's music does not meet the definitions of 'obscenity' or 'hate literature' in the Criminal Code;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the Liberal government of Canada to amend the Criminal Code in order to ensure that Marilyn Manson and other people directing messages of hate and derision towards vulnerable children and youth are not permitted to perform in Canada, and to ensure that messages which offend the moral and ethical sensibilities of Ontarians are not given a voice at venues financed by the taxpayers of Ontario, including the Ottawa Congress Centre."

I've affixed my own signature thereto.

1510

BEAR HUNTING

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a petition signed by 166 people in Ontario which has been forwarded to me by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. It says:

"Whereas black bear populations in Ontario are healthy, with between 75,000 and 100,000 animals, and their numbers are stable or increasing in many areas of the province; and

"Whereas black bear hunting is enjoyed by over 20,000 hunters annually in Ontario and black bears are a well-managed renewable resource; and

"Whereas hunting regulations are based on sustained yield principles and all forms of hunting are needed to optimize the socioeconomic benefits associated with hunting; and

"Whereas the value of the spring bear hunt to tourist operators in northern Ontario is $30 million annually, generating about 500 person-years of employment; and

"Whereas animal rights activists have launched a campaign of misinformation and emotional rhetoric to ban bear hunting and to end our hunting heritage in Ontario, ignoring the enormous impact this would have on the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government protect our hunting heritage and continue to support all forms of black bear hunting."

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas workers' health and safety must be protected in the province of Ontario, especially the right to refuse work which is likely to endanger a worker, the right to know about workplace hazards and the right to participate in joint health and safety committees; and

"Whereas the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations help protect workers' health and safety and workers' rights in this area; and

"Whereas the government's discussion paper, Review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, threatens workers' health and safety by proposing to deregulate the existing act and regulations, to reduce or eliminate workers' health and safety rights and to reduce enforcement of health and safety laws by the Ministry of Labour; and

"Whereas workers must have a full opportunity to be heard about this proposed drastic erosion in their present protections from injuries and occupational diseases;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose any attempt to erode the present provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations. Further we, the undersigned, demand that public hearings on the discussion paper be held in at least 20 communities throughout Ontario," not like the disgrace of Bills 99 and 136.

I add my name to theirs.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Dave Boushy (Sarnia): I have a petition from my riding signed by about 20 people.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government has failed to address the root causes of waste, duplication and unnecessary administration in our health care system; and

"Whereas the provincial government has introduced Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, that makes it easier for employers to reduce the number of front-line staff and to lower their salaries and benefits and thus causing further deterioration in quality patient care; and

"Whereas Bill 136 also erodes the democratic process by tampering with collective agreements and potentially interfering with workers' choice of bargaining agents;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136, the Public

Sector Transition Stability Act, and restructure the health care system in a safe, coordinated and rational way."

TFO

M. David Ramsay (Timiskaming) : «À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

«Attendu que TFO appartient aux Ontariens et Ontariennes ;

«Attendu que le gouvernement de Mike Harris a fait fi des sentiments de la population qui veut le maintien de la propriété et du financement public de TFO en tant que diffuseur éducationnel en soumettant TFO à un examen concernant sa privatisation ;

«Attendu que le gouvernement de Mike Harris n'a pas indiqué que la population participerait à part entière à l'examen concernant la privatisation ;

«Nous, soussignataires de cette pétition présentée à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario, demandons la tenue d'une consultation publique, ouverte et honnête auprès des Ontariens et Ontariennes avant qu'une décision sur l'avenir de TFO soit prise.»

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I have a petition sent to me by Carolyn High from the Lakehead Women Teachers' Association, very concerned about Bill 136. I will read the petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 will effectively suspend all labour relation rights for municipal, health and school board employees affected by provincially forced amalgamations; and

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 will hurt average workers in every community across Ontario, including nurses, teachers, firemen and police officers; and

"Whereas the Harris government's bill will decrease the quality of health care as well as the quality of education delivered in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Harris government's Bill 136 was designed to provide the government with sweeping powers to override long-standing labour negotiation rights for workers, including the right to negotiate, the right to strike, the right to seek binding arbitration and the right to choose a bargaining unit;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, support our MPP Michael Gravelle in his opposition to this legislation and join him in calling upon the Harris government to repeal Bill 136 which creates a climate of confrontation in Ontario."

Until we see the amendments, we will continue to not believe this government, and I am proud to sign my name to this petition.

COURT DECISION

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): "To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas at this time in the province of Ontario it is not illegal for a woman to appear topless in public, and due to the fact that this lack of restriction offends a large percentage of Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to introduce legislation that would make it illegal for a woman to appear topless in any public place except in clearly marked designated beach areas."

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INTERIM SUPPLY

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I move government notice of motion number 38:

That the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing November 1, 1997, and ending on April 30, 1998, such payments to be charged to the proper appropriation following the voting of supply.

I am pleased to put forward this motion for interim supply, and I would note that I will be sharing my speaking time this afternoon with the member for Scarborough West, the member for Kitchener and the member for Northumberland.

As most members are aware, the motion for interim supply provides the government with the authority to make payments to hospitals, physicians, boards of education, municipalities, suppliers, civil servants and others. These payments are currently being made under the authority of a motion for interim supply which came into effect on May 1, 1997.

The motion for interim supply is required now as the authority under the existing motion expires on October 31st, 1997, and payments cannot be made after that date. Scheduled payments in earlier November include, among others, payments for general welfare, transfers to hospitals, school boards and children's aid societies.

1520

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I am pleased to begin debate on interim supply. Just to inform you, I will be splitting my time with the member for Oriole and the member for Ottawa West.

I want to begin by saying that my leader today used the term "too far, too fast" in describing this government. I would say that what we've seen over the last week or so is perhaps a dramatic illustration of a government that I think is beginning to spin slightly out of control.

I would say that on the basis that we have now seen, with their plan to dump or download on to municipalities — the government has finally acknowledged that they are

dumping about $660 million of new costs on to the property taxpayer. That is the first thing I'd say to the people of Ontario: Recognize that this government has decided to dump about $660 million of costs that the province used to carry on to the municipalities, on to the property tax.

The second thing I would say is that not only have they dumped that on to the property taxpayer, but they've dumped many social programs that shouldn't be on the property tax. Nobody believes social housing should be on the property tax. The government has made a huge mistake here. They have dumped social housing on to the property tax. I think, frankly, it was purely a mistake. Al Leach said, "We're going to get education off the property tax," and didn't add up the numbers. When they found out what the cost was, they said, "If we want to do that, we're going to have to put social housing on to the property tax."

I would say to the public, when you hear us angry about putting social housing on, why is that? David Crombie and the government's own Who Does What panel — Mike Harris went out and picked 15 people to give the government advice on what should be on the property tax and what should be on the province. What happened? David Crombie said, "Don't put social housing on property tax." But lo and behold, the government's doing that. It's a huge mistake.

I listened carefully to the Minister of Municipal Affairs one day on a radio interview and they said to him, "Should you be putting what's called income redistribution programs on property tax?" Al Leach said, "No, you shouldn't be doing that." Then the interviewer said, "Well, why are you putting social housing on?" He said, "We eventually would like things like that to be part of the provincial responsibility, but for the time being they're going to be on the property tax." That's the second thing where in our opinion the government is spinning slightly out of control.

The third area I want to talk a little bit about is the whole area of health. What we're finding now is that the government is closing an enormous number of hospitals across the province. My leader today had an illustration where in his own area of Ottawa the government has ordered three hospitals to close, and they're going to have to close in 1998, before the remaining hospitals will have constructed the necessary services to absorb the patients from those three closed hospitals. So even if one accepts the government's hypothesis of closing hospitals, the government has a plan that is going to cause chaos across the province, and there is no question of that.

Here in Metro I represent a Metro riding and one of the hospitals is closing November 1, I believe, certainly in November 1997, but there's been no planning of how the patients who are currently in that facility are going to be accommodated. That's the third area of chaos. It's in the health sector, where the government has created a chaotic situation.

I might add that personally I am terribly afraid the government has underestimated the future health needs for our hospital sector. We are heading one way, closing facilities, at the same time as Ontario's population is growing and aging. I can almost guarantee that in two or three years from now we're all going to be saying, "How in the world did we let that happen where we closed all those facilities without looking at the needs?"

The fourth area of chaos is property tax reform. All of us here I think should recognize that the government has embarked on the most massive change in the property tax system in the history of the province, and it has never given us, never given its back bench, never given the opposition, never given the public any indication of what the impact will be.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): Zero impact.

Mr Phillips: The member for Scarborough East is, as usual, yapping, as he's wont to do. He loves to talk, he's the world's greatest talker, but no answers, because the government refuses to give any impact studies.

The amazing thing to me is this: We are going to be dealing with a property tax bill called Bill 149. It gives the Minister of Finance unprecedented powers to set tax rates. I always thought the Conservative back bench was opposed to giving that sort of tax power to a cabinet. I always thought the Conservative Party, certainly the Reform element in the Conservative Party, would have been completely, totally against that. But the bill we're going to deal with, I think this Thursday afternoon is the current schedule, calls for unprecedented power in the hands of the Minister of Finance.

We are also going to be asked to approve a bill where over half of the business property tax will be for education. We still haven't found out from the government whether it will be a uniform mill rate across the province or how that mill rate will be set, but the thing we do know is that it is going to cause chaos in our business sector. That's the fourth area.

I'm going through these massive changes. We frequently find, once the government starts on these massive changes, that it hasn't thought them through. I'll give you a couple of small examples. Al Palladini had a smiling face opening the great private sector toll road, 407. I must say it has been an artistic success. It is one of the busiest toll roads in North America. The only problem is there has never been a toll put on it. They have never opened the tolls, and the costs are adding up.

Hon Noble Villeneuve (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs): October 14.

Mr Phillips: One of the ministers says October 14. That's only nine months late.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Look at all the money you've lost.

Mr Phillips: Yes, all the money we've lost. The amazing thing was that the Minister of Transportation said: "We've got a problem. It's so successful we're going to have to keep it free." It's like opening a grocery store and saying, "We've got more customers than we can handle so we're going to have to give the food away until we get a new cash register." It is an embarrassment. It's like the famous boot camp opening. The day Bob Runciman was

going to snip the ribbon the prisoners walked out of the boot camp. I just use these examples.

Do you remember Bill 26, the omnibus bill? We call it the bully bill. The government introduced it and said: "We want it passed right away. It's a perfect bill." Then they had to propose 150 amendments to the bill. One of the most amazing sights in all my time here in the Legislature was that the amendments had to be in at 4 o'clock.

Interjection.

Mr Phillips: I hear the Minister of Agriculture yip-yapping over here. He was talking earlier about a summer program for students in his office. What did we find? He hired a summer student, and what was he doing? He was out raising money for Mike Harris, with the taxpayers paying the bill. He had him on his staff. As a matter of fact, you had to dial the minister's office to say, "I'm prepared to give Mike Harris 200 bucks."

I just say that because perhaps I can understand these mistakes being made, but it is everywhere. It is a government that says it wants to run government like a business and it's embarrassing the business community, because everything they touch seems to fall apart.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: Don't you wish.

Mr Phillips: Don't I wish, he's saying. Unfortunately that is the case. It's a bit like last week where the government said: "We've thought through what we're going to do on this labour bill. We've been talking about this for months." So they introduced the labour bill, and before we have even had a chance to get it to committee, the government says, "We are going to make massive changes in it." And then you know something, Mr Speaker? They say, "We won't tell you what they are, though, until after the public hearings, because we certainly wouldn't want people coming to those public hearings debating what we're going to do with the bill." It is absurd.

I hope the public understands the frustration. The government gives us a bill and says, "Go to a public hearing so people can come and debate and give input into the bill, but I will tell you," the government said just last week, "we're going to make sweeping changes in the bill, but we won't tell you what they are until after you've had the public hearings." It's a sham, it's an embarrassment. What are we doing here? We're going to waste the taxpayers' money. They are going to pay to have those committees staffed, to have the Hansards done, to have all of that expense going on, having people come from around the province to present, thinking that they are having some input into a bill when they haven't even been told what the major content of the bill is.

1530

Yesterday we had the Minister of Education put out a huge bill on education, and a great public relations exercise, I must say. A lot of money spent on the graphics, and he had his hair combed, always has a good-looking suit on, slick as can be, great speech, believe me, and the signs in behind well-rehearsed. Al Palladini would hire John Snobelen in a minute. He could put him on the used car lot and the car lot would be empty, because this guy can sell anything. But I just say to the public, why are we so sceptical? It is because the minister says, "This is about improving the quality of education, but I'm going to take $1 billion out of education."

I come from a Metropolitan Toronto constituency and I can tell you that one of the reasons Metropolitan Toronto has worked, and there's no question of this, is that there has been a quality of schools in our neighbourhoods. We are blessed in Metropolitan Toronto. We do not have downtown neighbourhoods where people have a concern about their education system.

People do not mind. They like to live in the core of the urban area, and one of the reasons is you can be sure of a quality education in your local schools. That doesn't come cheap. It requires resources, and it requires resources that may not be needed in other neighbourhoods that don't have the same demands put on them. I can guarantee that the future of our major urban centres depends heavily on a quality education system, where people can feel that "Regardless of what neighbourhood I'm in, I can send my child to the local school and be assured of a quality education system."

I know what the government's all about. They want to cut education spending. They've got to do it. The Common Sense Revolution —

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): That pays for the tax cut.

Mr Phillips: My friend says they have to pay for the tax cut, and that's exactly the case. They said, "We are going to cut a billion and a half dollars out of public education and that's what we need to pay for our tax cut." When the public see us concerned about the rhetoric around the education bill, it is because we know in behind it the real motive.

I was duped. I went to one of John Snobelen's press conferences just before Christmas where he said: "We're going to maintain education spending for 1997. We're not going to make any further cuts." I went away feeling fairly good. It was only a couple of days later I got looking at all the numbers and I realized they weren't going to make any further cuts because they had several weeks before announced a $500-million cut for 1997. The reason I raise that is, Mr Speaker, you can imagine the scepticism that we in the opposition and I think many in education have when we listen to Mr Snobelen talking about education. I have a saying: Don't listen to what Mike Harris says, watch what he does.

I go through all of those things. I go through also on the job front. I can remember Mike Harris saying, "Don't worry about youth unemployment." Here we have a document that came out last Friday from the Ministry of Finance. You probably can't see it, Mr Speaker, because it's fairly small print, but it shows the youth unemployment rate for the first eight months of 1997. We're two thirds of the way through 1997.

The youth unemployment rate, 18%; the same period a year ago, the first eight months of 1996, the youth unemployment rate, 15.6%: up dramatically from 15.6% to 18%. By the way, I've looked at unemployment rates for the last 20 years. The only other time it was close to that

was in 1992, the heart of the recession. This is like a record level and dramatically higher than the rest of Canada.

As we are being asked here to approve the government's spending, I would just say to the people of Ontario, we have a government that is close to out of control and it is shaking every single major institution in this province. Our hospitals are being shaken to their core. Our entire school system has been taken over by Mike Harris. Make no mistake, Mike Harris now runs the Ontario school system. The trustees are frankly close to irrelevant. They've dumped on to our property taxes the most sensitive social services and nobody — Dave Crombie particularly said, "The panel strongly opposes such a move." They were unanimous in the view that they shouldn't do it. The property tax changes are coming without having thought through their implications, and they are going to hit, mark my words, next April in a way that is unimaginable right now.

As I wind up my comments and turn it over to my colleagues, I just say that it was two years and a few months ago that people gave Mike Harris a majority government, and we in the Liberal caucus understand that he has the right to govern. But he doesn't have the right to destroy the very fabric that has been built by parties, including the Conservative Party, over these many years, and we believe that's exactly what's happening.

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I would like to thank the people of Oriole for their support, for the privilege of serving them in this assembly. It is an awesome responsibility and I very humbly stand as their representative here.

On September 4 voters in Oriole sent an overwhelming message to this government and to this House. By a two-to-one margin, unheard of in Oriole, nearly 60% of the people in Oriole said, "You are going too far, too fast." They want someone to start to listen to their concerns. They want someone to start to act for their interests.

As I went door to door — and I know that the Premier was afraid to meet one voter in Oriole, because had he, he would have heard the same messages that I did. There is considerable anger, there is fear, and perhaps the most disappointing thing is there's a great deal of cynicism directed at the actions and inactions of this provincial government.

The issues that the people of Oriole had on a provincial basis but which struck very close to home — and I will tell you, Mr Speaker, and I will tell this House, that I did not find one family, not one household which has not been affected very strongly by the actions of this government. They told me that they're afraid. They're afraid that the health care they need will not be there when they need it after closing 11 hospitals in Metropolitan Toronto and the resulting increase in capacity at our local hospital, North York General, without the kind of support and the funding that is required.

In North York we're very lucky to have an internationally recognized education system. They see that being threatened. People of Oriole are saying: "Why is this government taking dollars away from our children? Why are they getting rid of a board of education which provides a quality service as recognized by this Minister of Education?"

1540

The third issue that came through very strongly was in relation to Bill 103 and the megacity. The people of Oriole were telling me that this government did not listen to their voices. I had a woman on Hawleaf Crescent literally shout at the top of her lungs that she no longer lives in a democracy, that she doesn't know why she should go and vote when she goes in a referendum, the same referendum that Mike Harris votes in, and it's totally ignored by a government which does not care.

It goes even further because of the proposals, as my colleague had spoken of earlier, to download services which were previously paid for by the province on to the backs of homeowners, of residents. The resulting property tax increases are just enormous and unfair, and it's a burden which the people of Oriole are rejecting. They're saying, "No more."

Finally, an issue which came through so very loud and clear: tenants in Oriole, 50% of the people of Oriole, saying that the only tenant protection afforded in the proposed Bill 96 is that which is in the title, that there is no tenant protection, that this government's actions belie their words. Unfortunately, that is a sentiment that came through. One tenant said to me that they don't know what they're going to do, because she and her three children don't want to become prisoners in their own home. That's effectively what's going to happen with this legislation. I did request, and I renew my call, that the minister withdraw that piece of legislation.

The people of Oriole were saying that they don't believe this government can be trusted to protect their interests, because they've been shunted away. They've been told: "We don't have to listen to you, because you're a special interest. If you're a parent, if you or a family member requires hospital care, if you're a renter, if you're a senior, you are a special interest and we no longer need to listen to you." Time and time again people have said that is offensive. Quite clearly, the people of Oriole are not buying what Mike Harris is selling. You can package it any way you like, but we're not buying it.

We had significant local issues, and I would like to highlight a few if I may. The first issue is Song Meadoway. If you recall, in August 1996 there was a tragic accident. A gravel truck went off a ramp into a townhome, and a young woman, Kim Wong, was killed and her two children injured. Then 364 days later, the Minister of Transportation drops a letter committing to the erection of the barrier. I want to say that the people of Song Meadoway will not sleep until that barrier is completed. In fact, there was a meeting last night, which I attended, where the plans were unveiled. There is potentially a significant problem, and I hope the government is listening and that they are committed to ensuring that this community is protected and afforded the kind of respect and protection we all enjoy for ourselves and our children.

The Oriole community centre is another local issue for us. It is right in the very heart of our community on Don Mills Road. I can't tell you the number of different programs that are run out of that centre and the fears and concerns because of the downloading this government is proposing, because they don't know if they'll be able to operate this kind of support. They need expanded services, not less. I would very much ask that the government commit to ensuring that we have proper community facilities, that they are staffed, that people can go there and access them. Unfortunately, that is sorely lacking.

Our community in Oriole is incredibly diverse. Certainly men and women, young and old, but I'm told that over 50 languages and dialects are spoken in Oriole. The Minister of Education has spoken about the need to meet student needs and the need to focus spending on students. People in Oriole just cannot understand, after $533 million has been stolen from children, with a further $1 billion to come, just how the needs of their children are going to be met, particularly those in the heritage or, as it's now called, the international language program. I implore this government to affirm and to commit today to full and adequate funding for a very competitive and very important school program.

Seniors are also a very large component of Oriole. The ripoff for drug payment, Bill 96, the municipal downloading forcing either higher property taxes or long-term care on to municipalities, hospital closures: Seniors are saying, "Enough is enough." It's time to start respecting the people who built our community.

It's important that we all reflect on why we are in this place. It is our local needs. It is the people who have built our community, all of the communities across Ontario. Unfortunately, we've had a government which seeks to minimize people, which, as Oscar Wilde once put it, knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

Our communities are beyond price. We can in fact have pride in them. We can in fact want to build something and build on top of what we have: not tear it apart, not remove it, but build.

When I have a mother in Oriole say to me, "Will my child not be able to go to junior kindergarten?" because 24 boards of education dropped junior kindergarten in Ontario last year because of the direct decision of this government to make it non-mandatory and to also remove the funding, that's a real concern. I hope the government is listening, and I hope they're going to act, and I hope they're going to give some assurance to the people of my community, who say that we need these programs, that these are important, that they are our future.

My commitment to my constituents, to the members of my community in Oriole, is that I will work, as I have in the past, to bring public openness and public accountability to what happens in this place and what happens across Ontario. If I can relate a very brief example of that, as a former school trustee for our local neighbourhood I ensured public participation in our budgeting process. I said: "Let's take it away from this building. Let's go out and meet people. More importantly, let's listen; let's engage in a dialogue."

We've seen that this government does not want to engage in such a dialogue. It introduces time allocation motions. It says, "We're going to go to four communities." It says: "We're going to pick and choose who we're going to listen to. We don't want you to see the contents of what we're going to be debating." That is a total sham, it is a total embarrassment and it is a disgrace.

The absolute success that we enjoyed as a board of education, because we brought people in, because we opened our doors, because we went outside to seek opinion, because we listened, is a testament to what can happen when people work together. You see, the people of Oriole, indeed the people of Ontario, are resources that we need to tap; they are not obstacles to be overcome.

1550

As I've said, listening is perhaps the key in a dialogue, any dialogue. One party speaks but the other party listens. What I heard at the doors was that people felt that nobody is listening, that nobody cares, that they have something to sell but they don't know if they want to buy. They're receptive. They want to work together.

The people of Oriole have built something very special, and they're saying: "Why is nobody listening when we take the time to get involved in our community on a local level, on a provincial level? Why is the province not prepared to listen to our concerns? Why are they not prepared to act on our concerns?" That's a very sad commentary on the direction this government has chosen.

As I said earlier, the cynicism is perhaps the most disheartening aspect of what I heard at the doors. This is a time in our history when we should be engaging people. Right now, we seem more intent on shutting them out. I must say to all the members of this House, but particularly members of the government, that people will vote with their feet.

To build the kind of province and the kind of communities we have right now, we have brought people together, we have looked for new ideas. No one has said, "I have the source of all ideas and knowledge." Together we can work, but there must be a willingness, there must be an openness, there must be an honest attempt to solicit opinion, to listen and to act. That's not happening.

To the people of Oriole I say very clearly, I will always be there when you need me. Should the need arise, I want to assure my bosses that I will work my hardest, I will try to solve problems, I will always, always respond.

Finally, what is this place all about and what is the purpose of this assembly? It's to build something. It is to build a brighter future not only for our young people but for all of us. When I go to a household and they tell me that their kids, who are college- or university-trained, cannot find work — when they are told there are all these jobs being created, they ask me where they are. There are résumés that young, bright, energetic, hardworking people have. They want to give them to employers but they can't find them. "Where are these jobs?" they ask me. I have to answer that, unfortunately, no one is willing to tell us.

There's a lot of bravado but very little action and very little result.

We have a problem in the province with 18% unemployed youth, but even worse, I'm told that the percentage of underemployed young people is close to reaching those proportions. This is a significant problem and nobody seems to want to tackle it, nobody seems to want to address it. It is at all of our peril if we do not make the investment in our young people. This is our future. These are our future leaders. These are our future taxpayers. Why won't the government do something? Why the foot-dragging? Why the silence? The people of Oriole want to know.

As I said earlier, we've seen slickness, we've seen packaging, we've seen promises, but they've been broken. Behind the façade there's just a bunch of guys with slicked-back hair pulling the strings. We're not buying it. We are not buying what this government is selling us. You can package it any way you like, but the people of Oriole know the real thing when they see it, and it has not been presented. There has been no attempt to meet the needs of the people of my community.

It is incumbent upon this government and this assembly to say: "Yes, we will make the necessary investment. Yes, we will listen. Yes, we will act on your behalf." I urge the government to say yes to parents, say yes to seniors, especially say yes to tenants. Tell them. Show them. Actions speak louder than words. Make sure that our communities remain vibrant and that we have the ability to grow.

I will shortly turn the floor over to my colleague from Ottawa West. I would just like to reiterate and thank the people of Oriole for the privilege they have granted me. My energy and my dedication are theirs, and I hope I can represent them well in this House.

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): As I stand in my place today, I welcome this, my first opportunity to speak to the Legislature, on the matter of interim supply. Interim supply is the motion that permits taxpayers' money to be spent by the government of the day, as approved by the taxpayers and elected representatives in this Legislature.

I was recently elected as the representative for the people in Ottawa West to this Legislature, indeed by a majority of the voters in Ottawa West, to speak here on their behalf. This is an honour and a responsibility that I take very seriously. I can tell this assembly that I have been humbled by the confidence given to me by the electors in my community in Ottawa West.

Ottawa West has been in its present form for over 30 years. It will change significantly in the next provincial election when the new boundaries take effect. It's an older suburban riding in the city of Ottawa, built primarily after the Second World War. In fact, as I discovered after 15 years of knocking on doors in that community, there are many seniors who originally built their homes in Ottawa West some 40 years ago, raised families there, built the community facilities, paid their taxes and are now retiring in place. In fact, Ottawa West, while having its fair share of singles and families and young people, has more seniors per capita than any other community in Canada except for Victoria, British Columbia.

In general, Ottawa West is fairly representative of urban Ontario, still largely anglophone, with a small but growing ethnic diversity. It has a residential home ownership character. Nearly half of my riding is populated by relatively well-off, older and well-educated residents as a reflection, in part, of being in a government town. However, more than half of my riding lives in rental accommodation, where the population tends to be younger and less well off. In fact, over a quarter of my riding, some 10,000 people, live in social housing, a combination of both Ontario public housing and City Living and other social housing providers, encompassing seniors on fixed incomes, the disabled and families, including new Canadians and single parents.

1600

I can tell you, as a former school board trustee in the community of Ottawa West for six years and as a former city and regional councillor, also for six years, that the residents of Ottawa West value greatly their quality of life. They live in a clean, safe community with excellent public and private services, ready access to green space, good schools, good hospitals, good transit, good water, roads and sewers, and good community facilities. They expect their tax dollars to be spent wisely. They do not begrudge providing these tax dollars to pay for the services in the community to support their quality of life. They may not all agree on the specific details on what or how their money should be spent — and believe you me, I am quite aware of it — but they do expect their elected representatives at all levels not only to preserve their quality of life but also to take advantage of the opportunities to improve their quality of life at reasonable cost.

This brings me to the by-election in Ottawa West. It would be too easy to trivialize my comments regarding this by-election as simply partisan. When 21,000 people vote in a summer by-election and two thirds of them reject the government's candidate, I believe we must respect their democratic decision and seek to understand it.

The number one issue that dominated the discussion at every doorstep I encountered in that by-election was health care. People are concerned about our current health care system, the level of care today, access to treatment and the growing waiting lists, the amount of time spent in hospital, the availability and adequacy of home care, the growing need for palliative care and long-term care. With the cuts this government has made to health care to date, even before considering the issue of hospital closures, people in Ottawa West were concerned and remain concerned about the viability of our current health care system. This was clearly evident by the voters' reaction to hospital closures in Ottawa-Carleton. The Health Services Restructuring Commission's proposed closures of the Grace and Riverside hospitals will affect residents in Ottawa West. Not only is our community growing but it is aging as well, therefore increasing our need for adequate and accessible health care. While all can agree that we must make better use of our resources and facilities, the

public in Ottawa West has not accepted this government's imposed solution of closing community health care facilities as an improvement. They see longer waiting lists, not shorter, as the result, and they are not willing to accept reductions in the quality of care.

There are other problems that result from this government's approach to health care. Not all the money from the over $100 million in savings from closing the Grace and Riverside hospitals, from shutting down the Elisabeth Bruyère Health Centre, from downsizing the Montfort Hospital, are being reinvested by this government back into the community. Indeed only $41.5 million of that $100 million has been designated by the Minister of Health for reinvestment, and it still falls far short of the community's needs for long-term care, palliative care and home care. This is simply not acceptable.

Of the $128 million in hospital renovations that this government has announced are necessary — covering, mind you, only acute care, not our needs in terms of palliative care or home care or long-term care — this government expects the local community to cover at least 25% of these costs, another burden for the local property taxpayer. And the time lines — hospitals to stop admitting in May of next year, a mere eight months away — are completely unrealistic given that the necessary renovations have not even started. The Health Services Restructuring Commission made it abundantly clear that the replacement programs had to be in place before any closures were to proceed, and this is simply not happening in Ottawa-Carleton. It is no wonder that the voters in Ottawa West lack confidence in this government.

Then there is the issue of education, an issue near and dear to my heart, given my experience as a parent, as a volunteer in our school system and as a former trustee with the Ottawa Board of Education. In this area, parents are painfully aware that this government has cut funding so deeply that despite Mike Harris's election promise not to affect classroom spending, we see school boards in Ottawa-Carleton and elsewhere in this province being forced to cut junior kindergarten, cut class size, cut teachers' aides, cut special education for children with learning disabilities, cut busing and children's safety, cut libraries and cut school supplies. It is all too painfully clear to parents that this government is far more interested in finding money for an ill-conceived income tax cut than in improving the quality of education for our children. The parents told me they are not willing to accept the government's price of school closures and program cuts in exchange for a provincial income tax cut. Parents in Ottawa West too have lost confidence in this government's ability to manage this important responsibility.

Another issue that is important to the voters in Ottawa West is the cost of provincial downloading on to local property taxpayers. Due to my previous position as a member of council for the regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, this is a topic with which I have some familiarity. We know that the Harris government is having some difficulty in making this initiative work. They are now working on plan D. Plan A, announced back in January, had to be abandoned as simply unworkable; plan B, announced in May, couldn't fly; plan C, released this August, still didn't add up; and now plan D is being worked on as we speak. It involves a massive shift of funding responsibilities from the provincial level to the municipal level, from provincial income taxpayers to local property taxpayers, in a manner that is supposed to be revenue-neutral; as we all know in this assembly, in its current form it simply is not, certainly for the taxpayers in Ottawa-Carleton.

According to the numbers released by the government following a meeting with the large cities mayors' caucus this past August, local property taxpayers in Ottawa-Carleton are to assume some $277 million in additional funding responsibilities for social housing, public transit, property assessment, provincial highway transfers, community health programs, social assistance, the drug benefit program, community ambulances, child care and community libraries, while absorbing losses in provincial funding. At the same time, some $185 million is to be removed from the local property tax base through the provincial assumption of half the residential education property tax. The net additional cost to Ottawa-Carleton property taxpayers has been estimated by the region, and confirmed by the numbers issued by the government, to be about $92 million having to be funded by the local property tax base. Their property tax burden in Ottawa-Carleton is not being reduced, as was promised by this government; in this shell game it actually increases at a rate of over $250 per household in Ottawa-Carleton.

This government has a credibility problem. It has yet to come up with figures showing that its proposals are indeed revenue-neutral, despite announcing this initiative some nine months ago. It is competing with another level of responsible government, recognized as closer to the people, which also has the expertise to provide responsible estimates of the impacts of this government's proposals on their communities. Taxpayers know, transition fund or no transition fund, that if this government insists on pursuing its ill-conceived plan, taxes will increase or services will be cut. One thing I can tell you, after 12 years in local government —

Interjections.

Mr Cullen: Madam Speaker, I seem to have provoked a response from the other side. I can tell you, after 12 years in local government, that people don't like to see their services cut, and they will remember why they were cut.

This leads me to an issue that is important to a significant portion of my riding, and that is the future of social housing. As I mentioned earlier, Ottawa West has over 10,000 residents living in social housing.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs Margaret Marland): The member for Kingston and The Islands.

1610

Mr Cullen: Madam Speaker, I need all the help I can get from my colleagues. They are here to help me.

Social housing is an important part of Canada's social safety net. It is affordable housing to seniors on a fixed income, to the disabled and to low-income families, particularly those headed by single mothers. It is being placed at risk by this government's plan to download its responsibility to local property taxpayers. The municipalities, all of them, have made it abundantly clear they do not have the ability to fund, from their property tax base, the subsidies needed to render this housing affordable to the people who need it most: the elderly, the disabled, families with low incomes, children from low-income families.

Further, they don't have the funds to finance the necessary capital renovations and upgrades this housing requires. What the government has announced in terms of transitional funding for capital upgrades is a mere pittance compared to the needs out there in the community. I believe it works out to less than $1,000 per unit of social housing, barely enough for a paint job.

It is therefore absolutely understandable that the federal government, which itself is engaged in negotiations with the provinces to devolve the management, not the funding but the management, of its responsibility in social housing to the provincial governments, has suspended its negotiations with this government because of these very concerns.

As well, social housing providers and tenants fear the downloading of social housing to municipalities will lead to unaffordable rent increases and restrictions to access to this needed housing by the very clientele it is meant to serve as the over 300 municipalities in Ontario that have social housing in this province struggle to control their costs, combined with the other costs of downloading, leading ultimately to a checkerboard Ontario in terms of accessibility and affordability.

Residents in my riding, those who live in social housing and those who understand its importance, believe this government's ill-advised proposals to download social housing to municipalities is, to paraphrase David Crombie, chair of the province's own Who Does What commission, both wrong in theory and devastating in practice.

There are of course other issues that people in Ottawa West spoke to me about during the by-election. I certainly heard about rent control, about the fact that the government's proposals for rent control in effect abolish rent control over time, as we all know in this House. We also heard about the environment, that the government's proposals dealing with land planning and land use planning don't serve to protect our precious resource known as green space and the environment — and child care, and youth employment. These were issues I heard at the door.

But consistently and overwhelmingly, people said to me that this government, the Mike Harris government, was going too far, too fast. Over and over again at the door — senior, young parent, middle-aged parents seeking to put their children through university, young person looking for work — all said to me, "Too far, too fast." They all recognized that the Harris government was indeed elected in the summer of 1995 to deal with the debt and the deficit, that some cuts had to be made, but overwhelmingly they rejected hospital closures, education cuts and provincial downloading as the price to pay for that vaunted provincial income tax cut. They would rather the government spend its time ensuring that health care services were available for all who needed them, young and old, for today and tomorrow.

I have to tell you of the elderly lady in her eighties I met on Melbourne Avenue during the campaign who told me at the door how she was sent home after being treated for a stroke and arrived at home requiring home care and finding none available to her. She had to wait. She had to rely on friends and family who weren't living in her community to provide that service until that could come, and when it came it was inadequate to her needs.

I must tell you of the gentleman in his 50s living on a disability pension who was trying to look after his daughter, dying of a brain tumour, brain cancer, in his home. This is an adult female, living in his home, he on disability because of a back problem, not getting sufficient home care to look after his daughter who needed constant medical attention while suffering from the ravages of this cancer. Again, inadequate service, inadequate health care.

Here we're dealing with a government that is not putting back enough of the savings it is taking away from the health care system in Ottawa-Carleton, not reinvesting all that money, not even coming close to meeting the needs of the community in Ottawa West.

The residents in Ottawa West would much rather that funding for education was better spent in the classroom, not simply cut for ulterior purposes. They do not accept that spending for special education for children with special needs must be sacrificed for an income tax cut that even the government opposite's friends on Bay Street tell them is unaffordable at this time. That is why this government continues to have the same credit rating as the previous government, and the previous government, after having its credit rating lowered four times.

The residents in Ottawa West would much rather see this government seek change through consensus rather than confrontation. How many times have we seen confrontation, the byword of this government, as opposed to working with the population it's elected to serve? Too many times they've sought to divide and conquer, to treat people living in the community as special interest groups.

They showed very clearly their opinion of this government, their lack of confidence in this government through their vote on September 4.

I believe politics is indeed the art of the possible. I believe we can look at politics in terms of not only the art — we have many practitioners around here — but as the science because we are here to determine how to appropriately meet the needs of our community with the resources we have. I mention that phrase with some familiarity, given my background in economics. Of course it has been said many times: You get two economists, you get three opinions, and I'm sure we're going to hear many of them in this assembly.

But I do believe, as a member of this provincial Parliament, that we have many roles to play in shaping public policy and in serving our constituents. We have not only a

role to speak out for our constituents on matters of public policy; we have a role to provide a human face to the process of politics in our community, to go and consult with our community, to go and give them the avenue to participate in the shaping of public policy here in this assembly and with the government.

As a former bureaucrat, I know what kind of challenge that is, not only for the community but for ourselves in this assembly. I also know, and this may come as a shock to some, that wisdom can be found in all parties, although in my view more of it is found in some parties than in others.

I look forward to participating in future debates in this assembly and I can only hope, as I am sure has been the hope of all those who have entered here, that my words will have a positive influence in shaping the policies that are to serve the people we represent in Ontario.

In closing, I consider this to be an honour, to be able to stand here in this place and address my views and the views of my constituents to the members assembled here. I can only hope, to reiterate, that I will play some small part in advancing the future of this great province.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker —

The Acting Speaker: Before you do the point of order, I was just going to congratulate both our new members on their maiden speeches.

The member for Cochrane South has a point of order.

Mr Bisson: Madam Speaker, I join you in congratulating the new members on these their maiden speeches.

We have I believe an all-party agreement that the New Democratic caucus will split its time between, first of all, Mr Pouliot from Lake Nipigon, and second of all, myself. We're going to start with Mr Pouliot, we're then going to go to the government for its 20-minute rotation and rotate back to us yet again 20 minutes after the Tories.

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I don't believe we've had questions and comments yet, as is provided for in the rules.

The Acting Speaker: Absolutely, but I was taking a point of order, which has precedence over my starting the rotation of questions and comments. So we will now proceed, with your help, to questions and comments.

1620

Mr Allan K. McLean (Simcoe East): I'd like to take the opportunity to congratulate the two members on their maiden speeches. I remember some 16½ years ago when I was new to this Legislature and I had the opportunity to do the same thing. It was quite an exciting day and it's a day that you never forget. To see the new members make their first speech here in the Legislature is something they and their families will not forget because it's a pretty proud day.

To relate to some of the issues they raised with regard to the future of this province, I think we've got to be fairly positive in the first speeches about what we really feel this province is and the direction this province is heading. I know there were several years of neglect, and this government of the day is trying to rectify some of those problems. So I say to the new members, you want to read your history, figure out what happened in the past and look forward to a prosperous future.

They made some comments with regard to the changes in administration in municipalities, how they are going to affect the municipalities, who is going to be responsible for what services and how the shift of responsibility is going to take place. I think what we've seen here in the last several months with regard to the shift of responsibilities will be positive and will put the province in a positive position for the future. When we look at the many aspects of the shift of responsibilities, for many years as a municipal politician I was hoping that one day we'd get the total cost of education off the property tax. I thought we were finally doing that until AMO came along and came back with their recommendations that they only wanted half taken off.

I commend the members today for their maiden speeches and look forward to hearing from them in the future.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair made an error originally in going to the member for Simcoe East. I apologize to the member for Cochrane South because I did not see you standing. We will go back to you now and then go to the Liberals.

Mr Bisson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to take this opportunity, as you did earlier, to congratulate the newly elected members of the assembly from the Liberal caucus, who had the opportunity on this, their maiden speech. I think the tradition in this House is, and should always remain, that when members come in, we have an opportunity to congratulate them on their speeches.

Truly in this case it was quite interesting. This is not something you would think opposition parties would say about each other, but I thought they were on topic and they gave a fairly well reasoned response to the motion here before us today in regard to interim supply. They brought it back to what they saw on the doorstep. I think what these two members saw on the doorstep is the same thing that Mr Wayne Lessard saw in Windsor, that there is a lot of anxiety and a lot of fear, I guess would also be a good word, on the part of constituents in regard to what this government is doing. However, I would not argue that it's a question that this government is going too far and too fast; I would argue they're going in the wrong direction.

There are a lot of people who worry: "What is going to happen in Mike Harris's Ontario two or three years from now when it comes to my children's education? Will I be able to afford, as a middle-class parent, to send my kid off to college or university in this new Ontario that Mike Harris is reshaping?"

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): Sell your cat.

Mr Bisson: The member across the way in the government says, "Sell your cat." I will not sell my cat. Fluffy the cat has been around for a long time and is going to stay at my house.

The fear people have is that in Mike Harris's Ontario they are not going to have the ability to participate in our

economy as full citizens, because many of the measures they are undertaking are turning our province into a situation where those with money will do quite fine and those who, like most of us, are average, middle-income earners are going to find it increasingly difficult to find our place within this economy. So I think they're going in the wrong direction.

Mr Gerretsen: I too want to congratulate the new members for Oriole and Ottawa West on their excellent maiden speeches. It gives those of us who have been here now for over two years an idea as to how the people on the doorsteps are still reacting to what this government is doing. I completely concur. From canvassing with one of the candidates, I heard the same concerns at the doorstep.

I also agree with my colleague from the NDP. I think this government is heading in a completely wrong direction. When you think about it, the United Nations has voted Canada the number one country in the world from a quality-of-life viewpoint over the last two or three years. I always believe that quality of life talks about a lot of things, but certainly good government programs have an awful lot to do with that. So here we're voted number one in the world on an annual basis, yet this government is trying to take a lot of those good government programs and either tear them apart completely or do away with them completely. That is certainly the assessment a lot of people have had at the door and that a lot of Ontarians have had as well.

I also found it very interesting to listen to the member for Ottawa West about health care in general. He has given us an example where $100 million has been taken out of health care in that community, and according to his research, only $41 million has been reinvested. We've heard the Minister of Health say here on a day-to-day basis, "All the money we're saving as a result of restructuring we're putting back in." So far, in Ottawa anyway, they are $59 million short. If you don't believe me, ask the people who need health care services on a day-to-day basis and they will certainly tell you, from the kinds of services they're getting in the hospitals and in the health care field, that it just isn't there any more with all the cutbacks your government has been involved in.

I congratulate both members on excellent opening speeches.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? The New Democratic Party. If we had been in rotation correctly, you would have had the second question and comments.

Mr Bisson: I would like to accommodate the parliamentary assistant.

The Acting Speaker: That's fine, as long as you understand we're doing that.

Ms Isabel Bassett (St Andrew-St Patrick): I would like to extend my congratulations to the two new members for Oriole and Ottawa West. I know there's a tradition in this Legislature to be courteous and welcoming, which we are very much to your arrival here. That said, however, I would like to point out a few inaccuracies in what you have said.

We believe that Ontario is headed on the right track. Since this government took office, the economy has improved in Ontario, and Ontarians are believing it. For example, an Angus Reid poll in July of this year showed that Ontarians, more than any other people in provinces elsewhere in Canada, believe that Ontario is doing well and that their quality of life is improving.

Second, in terms of other surveys, we see that more Ontarians say they believe that the forecasts for Ontario are improving. All private forecasters say that Ontario's economy is going to outstrip that of other provinces and most private forecasters expect Ontario and Alberta to have the fastest-growing economies in 1997. Over the first seven months of 1997, Ontario's merchandise exports rose 6.8% from the same period a year ago.

All in all, what has happened is that Ontarians are sensing that our fiscal programs and plans are working. The fact that we have cut the deficit from 11.2% when we came in to 6.6% today is sending out a message that we know how to control and manage our money.

Mr Caplan: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I seek leave from the House for unanimous consent to split the two-minute response between one minute for myself and one minute for the member for Ottawa West.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed? Agreed. The member for Oriole first, then?

Mr Caplan: No, the member for Ottawa West first.

Mr Cullen: I am very pleased that my comments have provoked a response from the other side. That's precisely the purpose of the by-election in Ottawa West. For a summer by-election, we had a 48% turnout of the residents in Ottawa West, and I think the message is very clear.

If the government continues to cling to its line that all is well and that it's on the right track, then obviously there is something wrong in the water we drink in Ottawa West, and having been a member of regional council I can tell you we drink excellent water in Ottawa West.

I would like to simply offer to my colleagues, those of you who were mentioning in your remarks the position of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario — of course I have participated in the deliberations of that body and I can tell you it is very, very clear: Property tax was never meant to cover the costs of income transfer programs such as social assistance and social housing, never.

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Mr Caplan: I would offer my colleagues opposite the actual results of the by-election, because that is the most accurate temperature of what the public feels about this or any other government. I can assure you that when 60% of the people of Oriole reject what this government has done and what it has not done, no set of projections, no set of temperature-taking by anonymous pollsters replaces the actual votes of real, live people. As individuals who have gone to the polls, who have stood as representatives, you should understand that better than anyone. I hope this government continues to rely on that kind of flawed information, because when people speak, that is when things

really happen in this province. They spoke very clearly in Oriole.

The Acting Speaker: Just before the member for Lake Nipigon rises, earlier the member for Cochrane South asked that the time for the New Democratic caucus be split between the member for Cochrane South and the member for Lake Nipigon, but you wanted to rotate the government party in between your equal split. I should have asked if there was unanimous consent of the House to do that. I'm now asking that. Is it agreed, therefore, and the member for Lake Nipigon is going first? Agreed.

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): I thank the members of the House.

First and foremost, I too would wish to commend the two new members. They've done an outstanding job in articulating what they heard on the doorsteps when they interfaced, when they met with their constituents. I want to wish them well and I want to wish them a long and active tenure at Queen's Park, representing in the most honourable fashion their respective constituents and ridings.

Interim supply allows members a latitude which is not afforded on other matters. Some may wish to deviate from time to time, address the people who got them elected, their supporters, the people of their ridings.

Every day, the Harris government takes credit for all the good economic deeds across Ontario. There isn't a day where you don't have a press release where the government says, "We and we alone are responsible for the economic recovery." The Harris government believes the mantra that the manifesto, the Common Sense Revolution, is the sole message that Ontarians must hear. The Harris government believes that the two previous administrations, those of the Liberals and of the NDP, resulted in 10 lost years, that they alone have a right, a monopoly on the welfare of Ontarians.

You have witnessed over the past two years an arrogance, a toughness never before displayed by any government in the annals of Ontario, to the point where if you are marginalized, if you are vulnerable, if you are a small-wage earner, if you are mentally and/or physically challenged, if you are poor, if you are a young person looking for employment, if you are an elder, you don't quite fit the agenda. Your lot will be less, so that the lot of the one-, two- and three-percenters will improve. Their wealth is galloping. They now control a larger percentage of wealth, command higher wages than ever before, at the expense of all of us.

The erosion of the middle class is palpable; it is concrete; you can feel it. The anxiety has led to fear. People do not have the same faith in the future they once had. Welcome to Mike Harris's Ontario.

Let me share with you a letter that was handed to me yesterday in my office from a resident of Kitche-Nuhmay-Koosib, Big Trout Lake, in the riding of Lake Nipigon.

"Hello and welcome to Big Trout Lake. My name is Reverend Alan Hartley. I am 72 years old. I have been a reverend since 1974 with St Peter's Anglican Church in Trout. I lived in my father's 27-year-old structure building for a few years, which gets colder in winter months."

You see, Reverend Hartley, 72 years of age, a resident of Big Trout Lake, one of our first Canadians, lives with his daughter and his granddaughter. The unit is 672 square feet.

"I survive from the source of income I receive every month for old-age assistance from the government of Canada, Gains from the province of Ontario and a retirement pension from the Anglican Church of Canada." Keep in mind, Canada, Ontario, 1997.

"My heating costs are quite high every year, buying wood three times a week from the local people, which costs $35 per load, totalling $105 per week. My electricity bill is between $200 and $400 per month during winter."

Suffice it to say anyone who is familiar with the geography of our vast and magnificent land here in Ontario knows it is very cold for very long in the community of Big Trout Lake.

Total expenses for wood and electricity were $820 per month. The telephone bill was around $70 per month and the sewage bill, because they do have sewer and water — our government installed the sewer and water when we had the opportunity to serve the province, so it's less of a problem, but nevertheless there are charges associated with that essential service, $40 per month. Other expenses — groceries and clothing — are approximately $500 a month.

Every commodity has to be flown in. A litre of gas, unleaded, is 90 cents, but if you pay at the end of the month because you don't have the cash, it's $1.10 per litre. The majority of residents in Big Trout Lake pay at the end of the month because they simply don't have the cash during the month. So it's $1.10 per litre.

Total estimated expenses are $1,430 a month; total sources of income, $892 a month. You need not be a rocket scientist, you need not emanate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to understand that there is a significant shortcoming.

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A first Canadian right here in Ontario, right now in 1997, while the government pats itself on the back and says, "Yes, we're doing very well; this is a recovery of unprecedented proportions," Father Hartley, the spiritual leader of the community, does not think so, not at all. Father Hartley was getting $900 a month in pension, but he gets $262.39 per month from the Anglican Church of Canada, so the government has cut his pension by $262.39. Father Hartley, 72 years of age, a first Canadian, must try to survive in a very difficult, challenging and harsh environment on a little more than $10,000.

Do you know that if you make $247,000 a year, the Mike Harris tax cut will put $15,000 more in your pocket? Two citizens: one in downtown Toronto, a chief executive officer or a vice-president of a company, a person earning $247,000, on taxes will save $15,000; at the other end of the province, Father Hartley, 72 years of age, $10,000 annual income.

Ask yourself, is this justified? Does it make any sense to you? They both only need one set of clothes at a time, they both can only digest one meal at a time, and yet you

have the disparity where the people who have an opportunity to run the fastest, to make more and more money, are galloping away from the middle class and are leaving the poor and the destitute, the marginalized, so far behind.

Is this the kind of society that Mike Harris will tolerate? If it were any other government, I would think not. We have a responsibility to give people all opportunities, all latitude in our market environment to progress, to prosper. It should be encouraged relatively without limitation. But we have a more important responsibility, that of giving everyone a chance to dream. We don't have this in our society at present.

This government has embarked in a downloading experiment the like of which has never been enacted in our province. The people of Lake Nipigon, the largest geographical riding in the province, with 26% of the overall land mass — you know where the riding is, Madame. It extends to Hudson Bay, nestled in the Canadian Shield, between the vastness of Lake Superior and the pristine waters of Lake Nipigon, the largest body of water beyond the Great Lakes, so Superior, Nipigon and Hudson Bay. We have the northernmost community in the province of Ontario, that of Fort Severn. We have 400 miles where we have no road. I want to take you on a small journey before we develop the theme and try to respond while we still can, if we're not under a state of siege, to the daily attacks of Mike Harris against the people of Lake Nipigon.

You leave Manitouwadge, where I reside and have been residing as a proud citizen for the past 32 years. We're at the extreme part of the riding, if you wish. Then you drive one way 600 miles to get to Pickle Lake. Once you reach Pickle Lake, this is where the road system ends in the province of Ontario. Then you must, by way of charter, hop on a small plane and go another 400 miles to the bay, to Fort Severn. You know that Fort Severn, the northernmost community on the shores of Hudson Bay, has some beluga whales. It's the only place where there's a tide in Ontario. You know that, Madame. Hudson Bay is the eighth-largest body of water in the world, and yes, we do have polar bears. They don't abound, but there are some sightings.

That's the riding of Lake Nipigon. It costs an arm and a leg to live there. Everything is weighed by the pound. In our special part of Ontario, we're more impacted by what this government has done and more impacted by what it's about to do. Let me share some examples.

Our riding is made up of some 20 reserves, 10 northern reserves and 10 southern reserves. We also have upwards of 25 other small communities. The largest community is only 6,000 people. The reason I say this is that on January 1 we will be asked to pay for OPP services, Ontario Provincial Police. Only two communities in our riding presently pay for the OPP, for police service. Where I reside, in Manitouwadge, we have a complement of OPP officers, but at 2 o'clock in the morning the service, the protection, if you wish, ceases until resumption at 8 o'clock in the morning. We are asked to call the 1-800 number which will connect you to Thunder Bay. Thunder Bay is 400 kilometres away from Manitouwadge.

But so far we're a peaceful lot. We're inland. Yes, we're isolated, quite resourceful. The crime rate in our community, I must say, and we're very proud of it, is insignificant, in fact almost non-existent. More than 50% of the people do not lock their doors. No one I know would lock her or his car. In Manitouwadge we don't do that; there's no need to do it. But we still need police protection, and since we're fewer than 5,000 people we will begin to pay for it, because Mike Harris and the gang have said, "You will all pay." Well, we cannot afford to pay a lot. But Mike Harris and the gang have also said, "You will get a saving of 50% in your taxes for the school" — I see the page here — to send our young people to school.

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On the one hand we will begin to save because we're only paying 50%, but on the other hand we will pay big time because we will be responsible for policing, libraries at the municipal level. We will be responsible for social housing. We'll pay now; the municipality will pay. We will be responsible for a range of services for which we are not accustomed to paying. Oh, we pay; we pay dearly. We pay through our taxes. We've had shared arrangements, a partnership between the provincial government and the municipalities. It worked quite well, thank you. But the government has decided to break it, to breach the partnership. "Out the door," they said to municipalities. "You pay now because we must give a 30% provincial tax break," with no limit, no cap. The more you make, the more you take.

The middle class will have to pay for all that. If you work for a small salary, you pay for the rich. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me, but when you're sitting where they're sitting, it makes all the sense to them. We don't court the same circles, I guess. We don't associate with the same people, I know. But those privileged, winner-take-all — and Mike Harris loves them all. People at the club, at Upper Canada College, I want to wish them well. I don't wish to take anything away from anyone, but they're taking a lot away from everyone except the anyone, that select few, those people who win the lottery, more often than not. This is where we see the injustice.

If you're a school teacher in Lake Nipigon — many of my good friends are school teachers, those women, those men who put the welfare and the learning of young people ahead of their own year after year. They're anxious today. They don't fully believe Mike Harris's agenda. They certainly don't believe that it will result in good education order.

Those are the frontliners, those are real people teaching real students. They are not in the ministry's office. Those are the people with real names and real faces. They're pleading with the Premier:

"Mike Harris, please, put the brakes on. You are scaring people. You're not providing us with the answers. Some things you mustn't change all at once. You are overestimating the capacity of people to digest, to assimilate, all of your agenda."

But no, all aboard. This agenda is about the trains running on time. They possess an unprecedented zeal. Examples abound. They have the determination and the zeal of some of the sects, some of the cults that one reads about now and then. This is a revolution, nothing short of that. They're very much aware of it. They know that revolutionaries hurt people, that during a revolution people will get hurt.

Keep in mind, a 30% tax break equals $5 billion. Keep in mind also that the provincial income tax, the PIT, is one third of provincial revenues and 30% of that one third equals $5 billion. Big-time money. It's not a secret. Things are going better and we should all benefit, but you must find the $5 billion someplace and you must find it quickly. In order to pay for the $5 billion, you must cut someplace else.

The audacity. You see the kind of snake oil that those conjurers of illusions, the kind of opiate they display. They say: "We're going to break even. This is a wash. This is revenue-neutral." If you ask them, "Does it mean that my property taxes in Marathon, in Schreiber, in Geraldton, Nakina, Nipigon will go up?" they say, "It's revenue-neutral."

Answer the question. "Will my property taxes go up?" You know they will go up, but they can't tell you, because it might go down someplace else. If I live in Nipigon, all that matters, really, is that my taxes are going up. They said, "Your taxes won't go up." I said, "What about assessment?" "Oh, well, your property will be reassessed."

The bottom line is, am I forking over at the end of the month the same money, more money or less money? Get it? It's not that complex. We'll do it again.

I get my property tax bill, municipal taxes. So far, so good. I see the Premier is acquiescing. With respect, Premier, can you guarantee that the people — yes, you can look at me, sir. Can you guarantee, Premier, that the people in Nipigon, anyone in our riding, will not pay more taxes? No, you can't. You can shuffle papers all you want and pretend that you're not listening, but you are the one telling people that the taxes will not go up, Premier. Yet we know, when we add all the services that are coming on stream on January 1, three months and a week from now, that we're going to pay big time.

The few dollars that we save on school taxes, where is it going to come from? Do they have a fund, do they have a contingency? How much will it cost? We can't get the figures. The mayors, the reeves, the council people are up in arms. They don't know and they don't believe that the government cares a great deal because the government is on the hook to transfer $5 billion. That's $5,000 million. You know, some of them are millionaires. Imagine if you were 5,000 times — that's a lot of money. They've got to find the money. There's no secret here, because they've got to pay.

The government keeps on saying: "We will balance the books. This is what we do best. We balance the books. We're fiscally responsible."

The way these people are going, they'll have all of us in the poorhouse. The debt keeps going up. Does it make sense to you? You have a credit card and you're a little overextended. In fact, you're big-time overextended, so you throw in another party. You ask them to raise the limit. That's what they're doing. Why don't they take the $5 billion and put it against the debt? Any good accountant, any economist will tell you, "Pay your debt first." You've mortgaged the province. Reduce the mortgage. Don't take a 30% tax cut and give it to the people we read about, you know, with those long, long cars — I don't know the brand name, but they're very expensive cars — stockbrokers, people who deal in stocks and so on. No, you pay the debt. You just take the money and pay the debt because it makes a lot more sense.

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Then you have Ontario Hydro, the society of high priests if there ever was one. They owe $29 billion. Oh, there's another $2.7 billion or $2.8 billion they've borrowed from our Canada pension plan, and pretty soon they will need another $10 billion, all supported by the taxpayers of Ontario.

I say to you, sir, this is no way to run a boutique. You don't run a shop in this fashion. You're inviting bankruptcy. But there they are in their best doublebreasted pinstripe, conveying, with arrogance indeed, that yes, this is sound; the economy is well managed. They are the last people to whom I would trust the few dollars that I have available, because for sure I can guarantee you I would lose that, because they're mismanagers. It's about time that someone takes them to task, because their ideology is a treadmill to failure.

Five billion dollars. The economy is starting to pick up. It's visible. You take the $5 billion and you pay your debt, and then you talk about tax cuts. It makes a lot more sense than the other way around.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Questions or comments?

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): No, debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Jim Brown: I'd like to split my time with the member for Kitchener and the member for Northumberland.

The Deputy Speaker: Could you hold on for a minute? Just hold on for a minute. Something happened when I wasn't here. I just want to be informed.

Mr Jim Brown: Will you stop the clock?

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that the honourable member has the floor? There is unanimous consent.

Mr Jim Brown: Can we have unanimous consent to restore the clock to 20 minutes?

The Deputy Speaker: Give or take 30 seconds, I think it's okay.

Mr Jim Brown: My colleague the member for Lake Nipigon tends to plead a little bit of poverty, but I think the first 100 numbers on his speed dial are stockbrokers. Of anybody in the House, my colleague would probably be the one who enjoys the tax cut the most.

In any case, I'm delighted to speak today, to remind this House that our management of the affairs of this great province is producing results.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt you again. Stop the clock. You need unanimous consent to ask somebody else to split the time with you. Agreed? Agreed. We'll give you another 20 seconds.

Interjection: You're going to have more than you started out with.

Mr Jim Brown: Up to half an hour.

I'm delighted to speak today to reiterate and remind the House that our management of the affairs of this great province is producing results. We promised jobs. We promised a better economy like Ontario used to be. We're only two years into our mandate and we're doing what we said we'd do. Since June 1995 when we took office, net new jobs have increased by 224,000; consumer confidence is up 18.2%; business confidence for that same period is up 16.8%; business investment is up 12.8%. In the last eight months, housing starts are up 33.1%, and over the first six months of 1997, exports are up 6%. Since June 1995, 220,000 people have come off welfare. The deficit of $11.3 billion has been reduced to $6.6 billion. We're on target to a balanced budget by the year 2000-01.

Because Ontario is prospering and because Ontario comprises 40% of Canada's economy, interest rates are down to 4.75% prime, allowing people to borrow, to spend, and allowing business to borrow, start up, expand and hire people. In spite of all this, taxes have been cut by 22.4%. We're well on target for our 30% tax cut. Yet in spite of all this, tax revenues have still gone up.

In my Scarborough riding, development is skyrocketing, neglected for 32 years of NDP representation. There is an economic rebirth focused on the Golden Mile. I remember when Scarborough's Golden Mile was the largest shopping centre and commercial area in Ontario. That was back in the 1950s. It looked like it was a mile long, and it was a golden age of retailing. It acquired the name Golden Mile. But the area went downhill. During the NDP regime, the GM plant closed, the Sears building was demolished, and vacant land dominated the scene. Crime, drugs and unemployment ran rampant.

Now we have hope, promises and prosperity. Today this vacant land at Warden, Pharmacy and both sides of Eglinton East is being redeveloped. Plans have been approved for the development of nearly 1.6 million square feet of retail, commercial and office space. It will be the largest redevelopment in all of Metro Toronto. The 1.6 million square feet of redevelopment will provide thousands of new construction jobs and thousands of permanent jobs. I'm speaking of thousands of jobs in my riding of Scarborough West, $300 million of capital investment.

The people in my riding don't want handouts; they want an opportunity. They don't want to be dependent. They're people who just want a chance, a chance of getting a job, nice, decent people who want to look after their families. They want to look after their parents, their kids, seniors.

I believe Scarborough is on the brink of a tremendous change for the better. We're returning to the days when a young person could show up in a suit at an office or with workboots at a factory or construction site and start work the same day. Isn't it nice to hear the words, "I've got a job."

My 16-year-old daughter just got her first job, by herself, without my help. She was so proud. She's learning a new set of life skills. It's a part-time job and it's a wonderful teacher. She got the job up the street in Scarborough.

To give you an idea of Scarborough's turnaround, there were $200 million in building permits issued in 1992 in the middle of the NDP regime. In 1997, there will be at least $450 million in permits issued. At Warden and Eglinton, the Golden Mile, there is vacant land from demolished buildings, and that's where the massive redevelopment is occurring. The first phase of a new Canadian Tire store has been approved, with a size of 100,000 square feet.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nepean. The member for Windsor-Walkerville.

Mr Jim Brown: Knob Hill Farms on the north side of Eglinton has applied for retail rezoning. That's tens of thousands of square feet. The first phase of redevelopment on the Sears warehouse building on Warden is 200,000 square feet, and there will be a large retail establishment employing hundreds. The second phase will double that size. The Volkswagen building at Eglinton and Warden is the new home of the community care access centre. In addition to that, planned around it, is an additional 340,000 square feet of new stores and commercial places. This area is the largest development project in Toronto. Total construction costs will exceed $150 million. There will be 3,000 man-years of construction work created and thousands of full-time and part-time jobs.

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There is more good news, lots of good news in my riding. Eli Lilly pharmaceuticals has just completed a $60-million research and development centre and hired dozens of PhDs and scientists at its Birchmount and Danforth location. Canadian Thermos has undergone an expansion in hiring. They make lunch boxes, the ultimate test of, "Are there more jobs?" People need lunch boxes, and their sales are booming.

Brenda Librecz, the executive director of economic development for Scarborough, has informed me that Scarborough is such a boom that she can't find an industrial building for rent over 50,000 square feet. She further stated that in 1992 there was a 17% vacancy rate in industrial buildings, and now it's only 6% and it's tougher to find industrial space to lease.

Right now Scarborough has 85% of the available green space in Metro Toronto. Green space is space suitable to build on. Developers want the space for job-creating industries, but home builders want it for residential. They're bidding for land that nobody wanted three years ago.

The Eglinton Square mall is undergoing a massive renovation. The mall is getting an exterior facelift and the

interior is being reconfigured: 300,000 square feet of retail space is involved and spending is at least $25 million.

We're building a new firehall, replacing the original Scarborough firehall number one. We've spent money on Scarborough Arena Gardens and the retrofit makes it look like a brand new arena. The Birchmount pool is a great addition to the Birchmount community centre. The pool celebrated its first anniversary this past summer.

The Sisters of St Joseph operate Providence Centre. I call Providence Centre the compassion centre of the universe. Providence has a $40-million expansion plan that will allow them to further help seniors, Alzheimers and the disabled. The Sisters are also building second-storey, single-family homes on the south side of St Clair opposite Providence Centre. This $20-million construction program will provide lots of jobs. On the north side, the Sisters plan to build more single-family units and seniors' apartments. More investment.

Economic growth, vision and the future have replaced the depression. My old school, W.A. Porter, has become a high-tech school with fibre optic linkages and a vast array of computers and software. The private sector donated the computer hardware and high-tech facilities, which make Porter one of the best high-technology schools in North America.

Near the northern border of my riding, a $60-million, first-phase retail centre is being built at Kennedy and 401. There are 500 construction jobs and more permanent jobs that are going to come on line.

At Birchmount and Ellesmere, the old Honeywell site that sat vacant for years will now have 1,000 homes on its 30-acre site. This means more construction jobs and more consumers for the planned retail expansion.

We promised to turn the economy around. We promised to cut taxes. We promised to eliminate the deficit. We promised jobs, jobs and more jobs. In Scarborough West, we're delivering. We're delivering jobs and more jobs.

We are back building Ontario. We are building Ontario the way it used to be, only better. The Golden Mile of the 1950s is coming back with a vengeance. It's coming back bigger, better, stronger and grander.

I can remember three years ago when power of sale signs were all over my riding. Empty stores and factories were interspersed with buildings being torn down, graffiti and refuse, and that's been replaced by positive economic activity and jobs. The new Golden Mile project will rejuvenate Scarborough and produce thousands of jobs. I think we've only just begun.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): I was very amused when I was listening this afternoon to the speeches from the two new members, as well as a question from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr McGuinty. I hear daily and in reading Hansard I refer to different individual speeches in debate, and I see that the opposition members commonly lead off their debate or their questions with, "This government is moving too fast," or "This government is moving too far, too fast" or "with reckless abandon," or that "this government doesn't care." Nothing could be further from the truth. We do care. We care very, very deeply for the generation that is coming along. If we are moving too fast, maybe the opposition members would like to explain how they planned to eliminate the deficit, to balance the budget in four years compared to our government doing it in five years.

There is something else that the members of the opposition party never explained. They never explained that they were going to keep health care spending at $17 billion a year. I have sat on finance and estimates committees now for two and a half years, and I have asked continually in those committees how the opposition party, if it had formed the government, would have maintained health care spending at $17 billion. They never explain that to us. They never explain that we are spending $17.8 billion a year on program spending alone and they would have kept it at $17 billion, and they never explain how they would have done it. They say we're closing hospitals. What would they have done?

Let's talk about health care spending. We know that some of the things we've done are painful; short-term, they have to be. However, we have done some reinvestment. For instance, we have established a rural and northern health care framework which ensures 24-hour access to emergency services, a $70-per-hour sessional fee for physicians who cover emergency rooms in rural and northern Ontario, $14 million for growth funding in northern hospitals, $6.7 million for northern community contracts for physicians, $4.4 million to equip ambulances with defibrillators and symptom relief for patients, and an additional $45.5 million to recruit physicians to underserviced areas.

The Ontario drug benefit program has been significantly improved recently. We have added 465 new drugs to the drug formulary. The Ontario drug benefit program now covers over 2,700 quality-assured prescription drug products for those over 65 years of age. The Trillium drug plan has been expanded to include 140,000 low-wage earners who were previously excluded from the plan — excluded by the former government, a government that claimed to care so much about the poor.

The Minister of Health and the Honourable Cam Jackson, the minister responsible for seniors, have both worked hard and have established a $100-million reinvestment in long-term care facilities, which will have the side-effect, by the way, of creating 2,250 jobs, with 1,750 in the nursing and personal care fields.

We have also expanded our in-home nursing care program; 80,000 seniors and disabled will be able to continue to live in their homes. I recently had a seniors seminar, and that is the one thing that the seniors said, loud and clear. They don't want to spend time in health care facilities; they want to spend their time in their homes.

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The minister has increased spending in other major areas. We've expanded cardiac care to reduce waiting time. Some 325,000 women will have access to breast cancer screening. A cancer care agency has been established to coordinate cancer treatment throughout the prov-

ince. Additional investments have been made in areas such as transplantation and the neurosciences. The number of kidney dialysis machines has been increased. Immunization programs for seniors and school children have been expanded. With our new healthy babies program, healthy children will receive annual funding of $10 million.

We have made all kinds of good changes to health care. That was necessary, but we couldn't just increase spending. The Liberal Party knew that, because during the campaign they said they were going to keep health care spending at $17 billion, and in spite of repeated questioning, they haven't explained how.

I want to emphasize that the Liberals never, ever admit that they would have had to take some tough measures to balance the budget in four years. They say, "Oh, we wouldn't have reduced taxes." All right, let's look at what has happened in Japan just recently. There have been three factors which have contributed to a sharp fall in GDP in Japan. One of the three factors was an increase in personal taxes. Isn't that amazing? In Japan they increased taxes and they saw a reduction in personal consumption.

We're not surprised at that. When we came into power, we decided that one of the key things we had to do was to reduce personal income taxes in order to increase consumption. We did so, and what has happened? We see retail sales up in every category: automobiles, housing, retail sales in large consumer items and in small consumer items. The housing market has rebounded from a period of stagnation to a period of boom. Not too long ago, in the last couple of weeks, I was talking to a contractor in my Kitchener riding who told me that this boom we are now going through is the biggest boom in 40 years, outside of the one in the 1980s. Well, that's not too bad.

Why is that happening? It's happening because there has been a tremendous increase in jobs. The member for Scarborough West, my colleague, just said a few moments ago that we have had an increase of over 225,000 jobs. That is a net increase of 225,000 jobs. That is good news, but of course the opposition parties never want to focus on that. They want to focus on those small items that don't mean too much.

We know that one of the areas in which we have to do better — and of course this is also recognized by the federal government — is youth unemployment. That will follow along. We are interested in the youth. We are interested in the young generation. It used to be called generation X, the lost generation. That is one of the reasons we are revamping the education system. One of the areas of education that must be addressed is technical training.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I always enjoy listening to my colleague from Scarborough and by colleague from Kitchener, who present thoughtfully the government's position on a range of issues and a range of current topics, and we are dealing with supply today. Let me say to the members of the government that there is no question that the North American, the Canadian, indeed the western industrial economies have been expanding. We have been expanding in a non-inflationary environment and there is no question that those expansions have benefited average people.

Where we draw the line, where we say that we disagree with you, is on what is the cause and what is the effect. Government members would have you believe that the tax cut is responsible for the growth in demand, the growth in consumption for a variety of products, which have in turn increased employment.

We say that's nuts. We say you're wrong. We say you should have focused on deficit reduction, taken the $5 billion in tax cuts. You know what? You could balance the budget next year. You could be in a balanced budget next year. What does that mean? That means that one of the largest borrowers in this country, one of the largest non-state borrowers in the world, would be out of the debt market. What does that mean? That means reduced demand for money. What does that mean? It means lower interest rates, still lower interest rates.

Interjection: Economics 101.

Mr Duncan: That's Economics 101, exactly right.

Let's talk about tax cuts. Let's get to a balanced budget, and let's deal with meaningful tax cuts. Let's look at property taxes. You have raised them in every community in this province. Let's look at our hospitals. Maybe instead of $5 billion in income tax cuts we could have invested $1 billion or $2 billion into meaningful health care reform. Your plan hasn't worked. A year and a half from now you'll find out it hasn't worked and we'll restore a sense of prosperity and dignity to our provincial economy.

Mr Cullen: Dealing with the comments that have been raised about the income tax cut is very germane because we are dealing with a motion of interim supply and it is dealing with the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars. One has to simply remind the government of the most previous Ontario-wide election, which happened this past June. This past June we had two parties that presented to the people in Ontario the exact, same policy this government has put forward, and that is an income tax cut. What did the people in Ontario do? They very wisely said no. To the parties that ran they expressed their views through their ballot and they chose a government that promised to reinvest the fiscal dividend into providing services and reducing debt.

If this government across the way would do the same thing, then I could tell you —

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): Come on.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Nepean.

Mr Cullen: At the door I found people saying: "Why don't they put their fiscal house in order and make sure we have adequate health care, adequate schools, adequate education? With the money we have, these are the priorities we have. Don't give me back the $16 or $20. I'll just" — I'll try to find a polite word for it. It would just evaporate.

In other words, there is a message to be made here: Put your fiscal house in order, then think in terms of income tax cuts, but don't do that beforehand, because the people in Ontario are not silly. They can see through all these

cuts, all this downloading. They do not accept closing hospitals, closing schools, paying more in property tax and paying more in user fees to accommodate an income tax cut they don't want. June 25, when they had the federal election here, across Canada and in Ontario the message was very explicit: "Don't cut income taxes."

The Deputy Speaker: Further questions or comments? Further debate?

Mr Bisson: I have to acknowledge it took a little bit of —

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): Is this your maiden speech?

Mr Bisson: It's not my maiden speech and it won't be my last one. Let me guarantee you that.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: "Aw," they said. That's so touching.

I want first of all to thank the government members for cooperating with us today to make sure we all have equal access to being able to respond to this interim supply motion. Normally there might be a number of questions and comments, but we tried to split up the time so that all parties get the same amount of time to respond to this particular motion.

When it comes to interim supply, the government is basically asking for, by way of this motion, the money to be able to pay the bills of Ontario for the next three months, I believe it is. Is it three or six months? Three; yes. If we were not to pass this motion, the government in effect would not be able to pay the bill. I can tell you, as a member of a former government, that we passed regular motions like this, as they are the regular business this House does. It's the process under our British parliamentary system that makes sure there is some public accountability when it comes to when and how governments are able to spend their money.

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What is particularly the point right now is that this government is undertaking a lot of initiatives that I guess we could say a lot of people in this province are having a certain amount of difficulty agreeing with or even comprehending. We know that the Mike Harris government was elected on the basis of what they call the Common Sense Revolution. People were clear that when this government got elected they were going to do a number of things; they were going to slash spending, they were going to balance the budget, and they were going to do a whole bunch of things to get there, but people really didn't know what those things were. As this government moves forward in the time it has here in the Legislature, we're starting to find out more and more exactly how the government is going about trying to balance the budget over a period of four or five years.

The first thing I want to say is that I believe that at the end of this government's term they will not have balanced the budget. I want to put that on the record. I believe, because of what I see in the numbers and because of the approach the government is taking, that they're making it appear that they're going to be able to meet their fiscal targets, but I think in the longer run they are going to have extreme difficulty in getting there. If the economy were to turn in the opposite direction from where it has been going since 1993 — since 1993 there has been an upturn not only in the Ontario economy but the Canadian and American economies — this government will go to the polls with a huge deficit which they're going to have a hard time explaining to the people of Ontario.

Let me explain where I'm coming from. This goes against the holy of holies, because I think most people in Ontario believe this government is going to be able to meet its target. I'm not talking about people who understand the numbers, I'm not talking about the people at finance or the people in banking or in the business community or the union community; I'm talking about the average person at home. Because of the rhetoric they listen to from this government, they say, "Oh, yes, they're going to balance the budget," but I really don't think they're going to get there.

Let me tell you why. Many of the decisions this government is taking when it comes to saving dollars I believe have very little to do with saving dollars. I think a lot of the policies and initiatives this government is undertaking have more to do with how you reshape government to make it fit more closely the government's ideology. That ideology, quite simply, is that government is bad, that we should get rid of government because that would be a good thing, and that public services to a large degree should be paid for by individuals on an on-need basis, in other words, having user fees or going to the private sector to get your services.

This government can talk a good line that it's protecting health care, protecting education and some of those key programs that we rely on in this province, but I believe very deeply that in reality the change this government is undertaking in the end is going to undermine the whole principle those systems have been based on; that is, that they are public programs paid for by the taxpayers of the province — that's you and me, Speaker — and that they be publicly funded and that public policy be driven by the government.

I believe this government, in health care and education, is opening very large doors to the private sector. The government will stand and say: "That's not a bad thing. We think the private sector has a role." Maybe in some very small circumstances they do, but by and large, our health care and education systems should be almost exclusively delivered by the public sector. The moment you open the door and allow the private sector to compete in the area of medicine or education, it is a slippery slope to the lowest common denominator, and that will be in the long run, once fully implemented, that those who have the bucks will get those services and those who don't have the bucks will get something less. What you'll end up with in education and health care are two-tier systems. If you've got the dollars, you can go out to the private sector and purchase the Cadillac of services, but if you're like most of us, middle-income Canadians, people who work for a living and make $40,000, $50,000, $60,000 a year, it's going to be very much more difficult.

I think we're seeing signs of this today. I know, as most members of the assembly know, because sometimes they're in the same circumstance, that families in Ontario — and not only under the term of this government — as do families across the country, have been finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet. Over the past years it has become almost a necessity that both the man and the wife work at full-time jobs to be able to try to live in our society and have the extra dollars to go out and get a half-decent lifestyle for their family.

That in itself is not bad, but the troubling part is it's becoming more and more expensive and more and more difficult for them to keep up with the Joneses. It's becoming more difficult to be able to say: "I want to buy my own house. I want to buy a car. We would like to take a holiday once every 10 years. We would like to buy new clothes for our kids. We would like to one day pay for an education for our children."

All of those things are becoming more and more difficult, and one of the reasons that is so is partly that there has been a large amount of unemployment that I say has been directly created in our economy in order to create a downward pressure on inflation. Large corporations and others don't like having no surplus labour in the marketplace, because that drives inflation. If there are few workers out there competing for jobs and there's very low unemployment, it means workers can go to their employers and demand a higher wage and thus increase the pressure on inflation.

I believe that governments, especially the multinational sector of companies — I'm not talking mom and pop's corner store — have put a huge amount of pressure in order to be able to downsize and create unemployment, so there are a lot of people unemployed. If you have a lot of people unemployed, it creates unemployment, which in turn takes away the demand on wage increases, which reduces inflation. I believe that's by design.

The other thing I want to say on that is that this government by its policies is helping to make that happen and helping to make the kinds of changes that will support that kind of economy, an economy where if you've got dollars, you'll do very well, and if you don't have dollars, you don't do very well.

Let's just look, for example, at the health care sector, what's happened over the past months to a year. The Minister of Health almost weekly stands in this House in answer to questions and says, "We have not cut a single cent out of health care." The Minister of Health and the Premier say they haven't cut a cent out of health care and there's been no reduction in services anywhere else across the province.

Interjection: That's not true.

Mr Bisson: Exactly. This is not true. We are seeing hospitals, not beds, close down across this province, we are seeing hospital programs gutted, we are seeing health units and district health councils lose funding at increasingly alarming rates, and we're seeing the individual programs supported by all of those organizations go by the wayside.

Let's take a look at what's happening in northeastern Ontario. It used to be in the good old days, a couple of years ago, quite frankly, up until about 1995, that if you needed bypass surgery in northeastern Ontario, depending on your severity — because it was a weighted waiting list; the more severe your condition, the quicker you got in — for the average person who had a blockage of somewhere around 85% to 90%, they would be able to get into Sudbury Memorial Hospital through the cardiac care system at probably a waiting list of around 30 to 60 days. There were extreme cases where it went longer because there has always been an upwards and downwards need for cardiac care and at times it might have gone as long as three months. But under previous Conservative governments, under previous Liberal and NDP governments, the government of the day made sure the cardiac care system was properly funded so that people did not have to wait longer than they should.

I can tell you that in my constituency office — and I'm not making this stuff up — I have, more and more so every day, people coming in requesting my assistance to get them cardiac surgery. They're having to wait upwards of nine and 10 months to get in for cardiac bypass surgery in the event that they're blocked at 85% to 90%. And this government stands and says there's nothing wrong: "We haven't cut health care; there's no problem."

The same could be said about a number of other services delivered in the health care sector. We're seeing, for example, in our communities across northern Ontario — now, the government announced a few months ago that they were going to cut the provincial funding to the northern regional genetics program. Because myself and the health units and others worked together to raise the profile of this issue, the government figured, "Small potatoes in the big scheme of things," and they saved that particular program, probably about $500,000.

But in the case of other programs, like the speech pathology program for under-six-year-olds in northern Ontario for healthy kids, there no longer is going to be any public funding come January 1, 1998, depending if we can take the minister's word today when she said she would talk to the Minister of Health and put that funding in place and make sure it stays in place. What it means for us in the north is that if you're the parent of a child who needs speech pathology services and that child is under the age of six and is healthy, you will have to pay out of your pocket if the government doesn't come through on the commitment they gave me today.

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The same could be said about the northern dental clinics, where the dental clinic provides services to communities that don't have dental clinics and don't have dentists residing in them. For example, my good friend Len Wood from Cochrane North would know well that Moosonee has no dentist. The only way kids who are of school age can get into a dentist's office is by way of the northern dental program, the clinics that are sponsored by the Porcupine health unit. They travel up there six or seven times a year, they book appointments ahead of time, and the kids living

in that community have an opportunity to see a dentist to get their cavities filled, to get their teeth cleaned, as we do, for checkups, or to have an extraction.

Come January 1, 1998, if the government doesn't reverse its position, those kids are going to go without any dental services, because the local market is not such as to be able to support a dentist in that community, and attracting a dentist to Moosonee is very difficult. It's a small community; it's fairly isolated. It's a wonderful place, but it's not the place that's foremost on people's minds to get there.

The point I'm getting at is that government has a responsibility to say, "We will ensure that access to services for Ontarians across this province is somewhat similar." Government puts in place programs to make that happen. But this government is taking those away. What they're doing over the longer term is creating a situation where, more and more so, individuals will have to pay out of their pockets to get the services we used to take for granted.

I know the Conservative members, on being elected to this place — not all of them, but some of them — believed that would not be so. They thought the government would be able to trim fat and do all kinds of deep, mystical things when it came to the provincial budget and they would be able to balance it without hurting people. But the reality is, you cannot take $10 billion of spending out of the Ontario budget without people getting hurt and cutting out entire services. That's what this government is doing.

The point I'm making here is that the government says it's going in the right direction and doing all this stuff because it will be better. My argument is that it would be much better if the government really thought about what it needed to do and did the kinds of changes that have to be done to reduce expenditures over the longer period of time, but with the basic understanding that the bottom line is that the taxpayers of Ontario and the citizens of this province have access to services in a somewhat equal way and we can ensure those particular services are in place.

I also listened with some interest a little while ago when the Liberal caucus had their opportunity to debate this motion. They talked about how the government is going in the right direction, but they are going a little bit too fast and too far. I've got to tell you, I disagree with that wholeheartedly. I do not believe this government is going a little bit too far and a little bit too fast; I believe this government and about 80% of what it's doing is going totally in the wrong direction.

The Liberals would have us believe, "Elect us and we'll do the same things as Mike Harris, but we won't go as fast and we won't go as far; we're going to be somehow better." I'm sorry. I have a philosophical difference with the position the Liberal caucus takes. I believe — and I'll get to the Liberals in a second — that this government is going in the wrong direction when it comes to health care, when it comes to education, when it comes to the municipal downloading.

The Liberals are trying to make us believe in some way that: "Elect us and we're going to do this kind of stuff. It's kind of good, but we're not going to go too far, too fast." I'm sorry, but it is in the wrong direction entirely. What we need to ask ourselves is, what is the Ontario in the future that we want to —

Mr Cullen: Shoot at the Tories.

Mr Bisson: The Liberal member is saying, "Shoot at the Tories." Shoot at the Tories, yes, but you guys agree with a lot of what the Tories are doing. I know that's not the position of your entire caucus. I know in the Liberal caucus there are some right-wingers and some left-wingers, and sometimes they clash, but the reality is that there are people in your caucus, including your leader, who think this government is going in the right direction. As I listened to Dalton McGuinty's speeches as he ran for the Liberal leadership, there were an awful lot of speeches that you could have plunked into the hands of Mike Harris and had him read, and you wouldn't have known the difference, because on the major issues that the Harris government is moving on, Dalton McGuinty agrees.

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): The red book is from their party.

Mr Bisson: Exactly. You could almost have taken the red book —

Mr Preston: The red book was a carbon paper.

Mr Bisson: Exactly. I was a candidate in the last election, as everybody else here was. I remember quite specifically that the Tories ran on the platform of the Common Sense Revolution. The Liberals had a red book that had a whole bunch more promises in it, but the bottom line is that it was the same thing that you guys want to do. When it came to welfare, what did they call it? Mandatory work opportunities was what they called it. It's the same stuff. They wanted to cut welfare recipients' benefits by 21%.

When it came to a host of situations around the Workers' Compensation Board, the Liberals of the day wanted to cut the workers' compensation benefits, wanted to reduce a whole bunch of things that this government is now doing.

I'm saying, voter beware. There are differences of opinion about how we should proceed in this province. I think that's fair. In the end, the people make that determination when they go to the polls.

I see that the Speaker would like to have the floor, so —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The force? I don't know about the force.

Pursuant to standing order 65, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Eves has moved government notice of motion number 38. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

DEVELOPMENT CHARGES ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LES REDEVANCES D'AMÉNAGEMENT

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for third reading of Bill 98, An Act to promote job creation and increased municipal accountability while providing for the recovery of development costs related to new growth / Projet de loi 98, Loi visant à promouvoir la création d'emplois et à accroître la responsabilité des municipalités tout en prévoyant le recouvrement des coûts d'aménagement liés à la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The member for St Catharines had the floor.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Yes, you're right. They just called Bill 98, I hear, and I'm quite willing to continue my speech on Bill 98.

As I was saying when I was interrupted, the one thing that will happen is that they will have to build more halls in Ontario, and larger halls — so there will be a building boom as a result — to hold all those Conservative fund-raisers, because the people who are most pleased with this particular piece of legislation are the developers who are giving money hand over fist to the Conservative Party. I am told, and my friend from Carleton will confirm this, I'm sure, that the last fund-raiser they held in Ottawa brought in the largest amount of money ever for any fund-raiser in Ottawa.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: The member for Etobicoke-Humber says it was even higher than that. It's all the people who are good friends of the government: the developers, the people who want to end rent control. That's not the senior citizens I talk to. That's not the people of modest income who are struggling to make ends meet. What we're talking about there, I assure you, are people of modest income, and they don't want to see an end to rent controls.

But this Bill 98 is a package that goes along with the end of rent controls. I think there are a lot of people out there today who still don't know that this government is trying to end rent controls in this province, that the legislation will in fact end rent control. I am concerned that they don't know that and I'm going to help them know that.

To all who are watching today, all those seniors who have said, "We thought Mike Harris had perhaps a good plan for Ontario but we're a bit worried, so tell us more about rent control," I have to say, let me tell you what Mike's doing for you. He's going to make you stay in your present abode, and the way he's going to make you do that is that if you move out, way up goes the rent, and when you go into a new building, you're facing new rent and higher rent. That's most unfortunate, but it fits right into the pattern of this government.

If you are rich, if you are privileged, if you don't have a social conscience, you should vote for Mike Harris and this government. But if you are not, if you are none of those categories, I certainly recommend that you don't vote for Mike Harris, that you look for a more moderate and reasonable and progressive party, such as the Liberal Party.

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The Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I was here the other day, and I listened to the speech by the member for St Catharines but I want to comment on what you said late last week, and that is, this government quite frankly, on this particular bill, is taking a most interesting position. They started off with this bill by saying that no municipality in Ontario should pass any development charges back on to the developer. In other words, if you were a developer and you wanted to go out and build a subdivision project, the municipality would not have the ability to pass on what are called soft services by way of development charges.

Mr Bradley: They probably heard from Hazel.

Mr Bisson: Exactly. I'm getting to this point. We at the time, the NDP caucus and the Liberal caucus, said no, that's wrong. The developer has, to a certain extent, to be responsible for the cost of soft services, because if a developer builds, let's say, 50 or 500 new houses in a subdivision, it's logical to assume that the people living in those houses will use those soft services, such as libraries, recreational centres, day care centres or whatever it might be. To just try to slough that on to all the other taxpayers really is a disservice to the taxpayer and is basically a gift to the developer where the developer ends up pocketing more money.

We put that argument to you last fall and this spring, and the mayors of the communities across Ontario put that to you as well. Hazel McCallion, as the member for St Catharines pointed out, lobbied your government and said: "You can't do that. You can't intrude on municipal government in the way you are when it comes to our ability to determine how we're going to pay for services, especially in light of your download." The government said, "Okay, Hazel, that's fine, we hear you." Now the government is saying, "We're not going to eliminate the ability to do it altogether, but the developer has to pay at least 10%."

Why are we debating this bill? You were wrong in the first place. You should have withdrawn the bill and just left things the way they were. I think, quite frankly, this bill is a waste of —

The Speaker: Thank you. Questions or comments?

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): I am pleased to respond to the member for St Catharines, the one and only voice for the Liberal Party in this chamber. It's always a pleasure to hear from Mr Bradley, and on the assumption he speaks for his party, we're more than happy to comment.

Let's get back to the nub of what this bill is all about. This bill is about ensuring that when a developer wants to create new housing or a new office building or school, the improvement in that community, any costs of the hard services, are borne by that new user. What is not appropriate, though, would be the creation of an art gallery, an ice skating rink or a new city hall, suggesting that the occupants of the new development should be the sole

contributors to the funding of that other common community facility. Therefore, this bill makes sure that the municipality still has a 10% role in funding those other common elements such as an art gallery.

The bottom line is nobody disagrees with the thought that if there is an increase in costs to the community because the sewer line has to be extended, the road extended, the sidewalks, those costs should be borne by the developer, but for all those other things, it is totally inappropriate to put them on the backs of the people who are trying to create investments, trying to create jobs for the construction industry, trying to help us rebuild the great province of Ontario.

The member opposite also typified this bill and suggested that the government wasn't listening and somehow the process was flawed. I suggest to him exactly the opposite. We listened to the various stakeholders, including the municipalities and the development industry. As a result of that, we brought forward a myriad of amendments to the bill, and the bill that's now before us represents an amalgam of all those ideas, walking the best path we can down the middle, and this bill genuinely will serve its goal of greater investment.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I want to commend the member for St Catharines on his thoughtful and sensible approach to this bill. I want to say, though, with regard to development charges, this is just one more attack on local government. Local government used to be able to make those decisions about what was appropriate for a developer to pay and what might not be appropriate in their own community. It didn't need Big Brother to make those decisions. This is another example of the Harris Tories in the face of people of Ontario, in the face of local government.

I represent a constituency in northern Ontario that would love to be able to impose development charges. You would need development to do that. In our part of the world this is not a big issue; we wish it were. But this particular bill is symptomatic of the bullying and the harassment of local councils, local mayors, local reeves, where you tell them how things are going to be.

I was in Killarney on Saturday, and they're concerned that you're going to close the local school. St Joe's may be closed. There's a good group of people — the acronym is KEEP — who are trying to get together an environmental and ecological study group of the outdoors, and this school, almost adjacent to Killarney Provincial Park, would make it work.

I don't think the people of Killarney are terribly interested in development charges, but they are interested in the downloading of services that's happening in that community. In the little town of Killarney they pay $80,000 to the separate school board in Sudbury — $80,000. Part of that they won't have to pay any more under the government's downloading. Do you know what they are going to have to pay in Killarney for police services alone, just for police services? Forget all that other stuff, just for police service: $80,000. So it is a net loss.

On top of that, you're now proposing district boards, a second tier of government, because the local people, according to Mike Harris, don't know what they're doing.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): I'm trying to follow the government's intentions on development charges. I've tried to follow it right from the beginning, and I appreciate the fact that the member for St Catharines has helped me through this process. May I say as well that when I saw the member for St Catharines walk in the chamber here about 10 minutes ago — he was doing other work, of course — I thought: "Thank God. The member for St Catharines is going to get an opportunity to speak today."

Mr Gilchrist: Such a rare occurrence. We were truly blessed.

Mr Laughren: It's a rare occurrence; however, it's a treat when the member for St Catharines speaks. I notice that now that I'm in opposition too. He was no treat when we were in government when he spoke. It means, really, that Mr Bradley from St Catharines has done a flip-flop himself. He used to be really nasty and now he's very good and very effective in criticizing this government, but he wasn't always like that, I want to assure you.

I want to commend the member for St Catharines for his remarkable speech here this afternoon on development charges. I can tell you, the Liberal Party has a reputation for flip-flopping, but — and I hasten to add but — I want to know what this government did on development charges. Tell me if I'm wrong. Didn't they start out by saying that development charges would be allowed but not on any soft services? Isn't that what they said?

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): Yes, that's what they said.

Mr Laughren: Isn't that what they said?

Interjection: We used common sense.

Mr Laughren: No, you didn't use common sense. You used Hazel McCallion intimidation. That's what made you change your mind. You were scared out of your wits of Hazel McCallion. She terrified you, didn't she? She never terrified the member for St Catharines, though. The member for St Catharines knew how to deal with Hazel McCallion, I know that. I'm very pleased that the member for St Catharines made his points.

The Speaker: Response, member for St Catharines.

Mr Bradley: I want to thank all members for their kind contribution. Some I agree with more than others. I think we have to understand that when there is new development taking place, there are cultural services required in a community. There are libraries. There are recreation centres for senior citizens that we wouldn't want to deny them. There are skating rinks. There are soccer fields. There are new pressures for these kinds of services when there's new development taking place. If we could be convinced, for instance, that all the money that would be saved by not charging this development charge went back into the pocket of the purchaser, some people might say that would be acceptable, but we all know it's going back in the pocket of the developer. Some of it will make its way into the Tory coffers, because they're going to have

the fund-raisers, but most of it is going to go into the developer's pocket.

I'm glad the member for Algoma-Manitoulin brought up the situation at St Joe's in Killarney. I didn't get a chance in my remarks to do so. I understand the other concerns they have about the police services, for instance, and those costs that are associated with that.

My friend from Nickel Belt was very kind. He and I have certainly been more in sync since we've been in opposition than we were when he was sitting on the other side of the House, and that is certainly natural.

The member for Cochrane South was saying a while ago, inadvertently I'm sure, that he thought the Liberal Party agreed with the Conservatives. What Liberal members have been saying is that even those people who agree with the Conservative Party — not us, not those in the Liberal Party, but the people out there we talk to — believe they're moving too quickly, too drastically and not looking at the consequences of their actions. The consequences of these actions will be dire for communities across the province.

The Speaker: It now being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:30 of the clock this evening.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening sitting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 23 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 23 septembre 1997

The House met at 1830.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMUNITY SAFETY ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DE LA COLLECTIVITÉ

Mr Runciman moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 102, An Act to improve community safety by amending the Change of Name Act, the Ministry of Correctional Services Act and the Police Services Act / Projet de loi 102, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité de la collectivité en modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom, la Loi sur le ministère des Services correctionnels et la Loi sur les services policiers.

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services): I want to inform members of the House that I will be dividing my time with the member for Scarborough West, Mr Brown, and the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, Mr Grimmett.

I rise this evening to speak to Bill 102. The bill is entitled An Act to improve community safety by amending the Change of Name Act, the Ministry of Correctional Services Act and the Police Services Act, but we prefer to call it the Community Safety Act because it reflects this government's commitment to the safety of our communities and the security of the public.

There are two parts to this legislation. The first section will enhance the safety of our families and our homes by helping to identify dangerous predators among us, and the second part will make it more difficult for criminals to evade justice by simply changing their names.

Bill 102 amends the Police Services Act and the Ministry of Correctional Services Act to give clear legislative authority to the police and to corrections authorities so they can inform the public in accordance with the regulations when dangerous offenders are released from custody.

The bill also provides the legislative authority for regulations which will specify, first, the information that can be disclosed; second, who that information can be disclosed to; and third, the circumstances under which information can be revealed.

The second part of Bill 102 amends the Change of Name Act to establish a process that will update criminal records to reflect a legal name change. Currently, any individual can escape the consequences of a criminal record through a relatively simple and informal process, simply by legally changing their name. Bill 102 will close that loophole.

The amendments will also allow the police to get information about previous name changes and use that data to update their records. This will make sure that accurate information is provided when police record checks are required for screening purposes.

The benefits of this legislation are so obvious that it scarcely merits debate, but I want to take a moment to explain the background to this legislation and our actions to improve public safety.

This House is well aware that the government is committed to improving our criminal justice system. We have taken many steps to protect our communities, to safeguard the rights of victims of crime, to promote crime prevention as well as crime deterrence and to increase public confidence in our criminal justice system. This legislation is in keeping with those initiatives. It is based on extensive consultations with police and correctional officers, and I have examined the experience in other jurisdictions.

Ontario needs a strong and effective criminal justice system, one that enjoys the confidence of law-abiding people everywhere, and this initiative will help to achieve those goals. It will give the police the tools they need to protect our communities and it will give our communities the information they need to protect themselves.

I should add that the purpose of the disclosure of this information is to protect vulnerable members of our society. I want to make it perfectly clear, however, that vigilante action will not be tolerated. This government does not condone people taking the law into their own hands.

Under current legislation, police and correctional officers are limited in the information they can release to the public when a dangerous offender has completed their prison term and is about to be released into the community. The only legislated authority for the release of information is the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. These laws prohibit the release of information unless there is a grave health and safety hazard to the public. Those sections were never designed to deal with the release of high-risk offenders, especially in cases involving sexual predators, child abusers and other violent criminals.

We are all familiar with and share the public's outrage at the inability of our laws to protect ourselves and our children from, or even to warn us about, these dangerous criminals. Law enforcement agencies are uncertain about

their authority to release information in these circumstances and have asked for legislation to make their situation clear. Obviously public warnings are not required every time an offender is released from jail, but in some cases they are essential. Bill 102 will provide officers and prison officials with the guidance they need to make that distinction and the legislative authority to share essential information with their community.

This is also a balanced bill. The members of the justice committee listened to several groups who shared their concerns with respect to civil liberties and personal privacy issues. As a result, the committee passed a number of amendments to Bill 102 which safeguard privacy by spelling out the purposes for which information may be shared.

The bill, as amended, allows the disclosure of information to the public for one or more of the following purposes: protection of the public; protection of victims of crime; keeping victims of crime informed; law enforcement; correctional purposes; enforcement and compliance with another act; and keeping the public informed. The effect will be to warn our communities, when appropriate, resulting in improved public safety.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): Especially if there has been a breakout.

Hon Mr Runciman: That was more of a problem in your tenure, former Mr Treasurer.

The second part of Bill 102 deals with the Change of Name Act. About 10,000 people legally change their name in Ontario each year. Of course, the vast majority of those are honest, law-abiding citizens who use the legislation for very legitimate purposes, but a small minority are criminals who have discovered that for all practical purposes a legal change of name wipes out their criminal record. Criminal records are filed by name. New name, no record; it's as simple as that. The result is a loophole in the law that allows offenders to avoid detection, evade arrest on outstanding warrants, hide driving offences, fraudulently acquire firearms and slip past programs that screen applicants for positions of trust.

For example, in a recent case in British Columbia, a school counsellor hired to teach children life skills was convicted of procuring children for prostitution, despite a criminal record for fraud and drug offences. Press reports said that he "slipped through the cracks because his criminal record was under another name."

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Screening programs designed to ensure that paedophiles aren't hired to work with our Boy Scouts organizations, our day care centres or our children's aid societies will be unsuccessful if a check of police records fails to reveal their previous convictions. Bill 102 will close that loophole. It will ensure that these types of predators don't slip through the net.

Representatives of the policing community tell us that this is a very serious matter. According to Windsor detective Neal Jessop, who is also president of the Canadian Police Association, dangerous criminals who use pseudonyms can cause a lot of problems for law enforcement, and he says, "It should not even be tolerated, not for convicted murderers and other dangerous offenders."

A person has only to have read the newspapers over the past few years to see how name changes have been abused by the criminal element in our society. For example, in the December 18, 1996, edition of the Toronto Sun, we read about a former biker serving life in prison for stabbing a mother of five to death who has legally changed his name; a convicted abuser of 13 boys who has changed his name and now police can find no criminal record under his new name; a convicted cop killer whose whereabouts are not known to the authorities due to a name change; a serial rapist who threw off concerned citizens who were trying to track his location by changing his name; and another man convicted of killing a police officer who changed his name and left Canada.

We also know that, when arrested, Paul Bernardo was in the process of changing his name to Teale in order to avoid detection due to his earlier classification as a suspect in the Scarborough rape investigation. The list goes on and on. These are the types of cases we want to avoid by passing Bill 102.

Some other jurisdictions have changed their legislation to avoid the possibility of criminals using change-of-name legislation to escape their records, but Ontario has gone further and will allow police to update their records by examining previous name changes to ensure that our criminal record database remains a useful and effective tool of law enforcement. Ontario is leading the nation in this respect, and I fully expect other jurisdictions to follow our lead in this important area.

Bill 102 is an excellent demonstration of ways government can work smarter. It will have no effect on the vast majority of people who use that legislation, honest individuals who have changed their names for legitimate reasons. But it will help restore public confidence and public trust in our criminal justice system. It will have a very real effect in enhancing the safety of our communities and in frustrating the efforts of criminals who attempt to use a legal loophole to evade the scrutiny of the police and the community.

I should add that we're hearing favourable reaction to this bill. The Hamilton Spectator said, "The Ontario government is taking an overdue and necessary step by introducing legislation giving police the right to publicize the names of offenders released from prison." The Guelph Mercury called Bill 102 "a welcome change," and there have been a number of supportive articles and editorials, including the Ottawa Sun and the major Toronto newspapers.

Bill 102 is consistent with a whole range of initiatives our government has undertaken to rebalance the justice system in favour of the rights of law-abiding citizens and victims of crime, rather than criminals, such as passing the Victims' Bill of Rights, creating the victims' justice fund, expanding the victims' crisis assistance referral service to 20 sites across Ontario and creating the victims' support line, which allows victims of crime to speak with a real person for referral to local services.

The bill also dovetails with the actions the government is taking in response to the report on the Bernardo investigation by Justice Archie Campbell which recommended improved information flow and cooperation between the various components of the justice system in the ongoing efforts of the integrated justice project.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the bill responds to the recommendations of the 1993 coroner's inquest into the murder of an 11-year-old Brampton boy, Christopher Stephenson. I'm sure all members of this House will never forget the abduction and gruesome murder of this innocent child in 1988 at the hands of repeat child rapist Joseph Fredericks. The murderer was a convicted paedophile who was quietly released back into the community, where he was able to become a baseball coach. No security check was done on him.

In the wake of that terrible tragedy, the Stephenson inquest recommended greater public disclosure of information on offenders being released from custody and encouraged public cooperation with police background checks. Christopher's father, Jim Stephenson, has pointed to Bill 102 as a valuable step towards protecting children from dangerous sexual predators like Joseph Fredericks.

I would ask all members of the Legislature to remember young Christopher Stephenson as we consider Bill 102, the Community Safety Act. It is our desire as members of this Legislature to try to prevent the terrible suffering of another child, of another family or of another community from such a terrible event. That motivates us to consider Bill 102, and I would sincerely ask all members to support the passage of this bill.

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): Bill 102 is another step in our fight to make Ontario safe and to respect the rights of victims and the public. This legislation will allow police the ability to pierce the anonymity of a name change. Criminals will be tracked through name changes.

Organizations like Big Brothers and Big Sisters have a program in place where anyone applying goes through a police check. This procedure will accomplish little, however, if the applicant has undergone a name change to hide from a criminal past. My Protection Against Pedophiles Act, Bill 145, requires any organization, including the teaching profession, that uses adults supervising or caring for children to obtain police clearance.

Bill 102 closes the name change loophole. It's intolerable to think that a sexual predator could get access to our children simply because he took on a new identity and slipped a police screening process. These kinds of risks are completely unacceptable and we need to make certain that we close these loopholes.

Criminals ought not to be able to hide behind name changes like young offenders hide behind the anonymity guaranteed by the Young Offenders Act. One of Ontario's most notorious killers was in the process of changing his name when he was arrested. Paul Bernardo was changing his name to Paul Teale.

The man convicted of second-degree murder in the slaying of Metro Constable Sweet changed his name upon release. The man in question drank and did drugs while he watched Constable Sweet bleed to death. It simply isn't right that people can hide from heinous crimes and go on to live their lives like nothing ever happened. I met Constable Sweet. He was a good, solid citizen. His life was taken far too early.

We are committed to keeping a watchful eye on anyone who is considered a high-risk offender following their release. We are putting the balance back in the scales of justice and showing concern for the rights of victims and the public to be safe. We are ensuring that these rights come before the rights of dangerous offenders.

The faint hope clause, clause 745, conditional sentencing or house arrest and an attitude that favours the prisoner make Bill 102 necessary. While my colleague John Baird brought in a bill for Victims' Rights Week, our federal Liberal counterparts have a Prisoners' Rights Week instead. Recently they changed the name to Restorative Justice Week.

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The name change legislation in Bill 102 will be helpful in other areas of law enforcement. Our police have a powerful information tool in the Canadian Police Information Centre or CPIC. The police can run a name through a computer in their police car and get a record of criminal activity. Outstanding warrants or court orders that have been imposed also show up. By linking individuals to their files, in spite of a name change, police will be better able to apprehend people who are driving while their licence is under suspension, violating a court order, abusing a spouse, stalking or a whole host of criminal activity.

The other important part of Bill 102 is the release of information on dangerous offenders who are returned into the community. This bill establishes clear guidelines for releasing information on dangerous offenders.

Terence Austin Matthews was released from Kingston Penitentiary for only six hours before invading a woman's home and beating her with a hammer. While in prison, he refused all rehabilitative treatment and the community was not warned of his release. Ten years earlier, he had been released on mandatory supervision. On that occasion, he was out two weeks before attacking two Ottawa women and raping another in a five-hour period.

Again and again, police have asked for clear standards on the release of information. The softer the federal government is on crime, the more our provincial government has to help to offset the balance.

Ontario police association administrator Dave Griffin supports this bill and urges the Ontario Legislature to pass it. He stated, "If you have people who are a threat to the community, the public has a right to be informed."

He said he has heard arguments against releasing information on offenders following their release as they claim it interferes with their transition back into society and they deserve a second chance. To this Griffin counters, "People who are on parole are people who have had their fair share of second chances." He added that people who are granted parole generally have a history within the correctional system.

Bill 102 sets out solid guidelines concerning the release of information. We're giving law enforcement officers the tools they need to protect the communities they patrol. Dr Jim Cairns, the deputy chief coroner of Ontario, has stated that "Chiefs of police have said: 'We now have a dangerous offender in our community. What do we do?'" Now we're empowering the police.

It must be a haunting feeling for the police to know there is a repeat violent or sex offender in their community and not be able to warn the residents. We need to be proactive with repeat offenders and warn people of the danger, not sit back and wait for the offender to reoffend. We should do something before the damage is done.

Last week it was my privilege to speak on a private member's bill put forth by my colleague from Nepean, John Baird. The bill would declare a commemorative week for victims of violent crime. There was a breakfast meeting prior to the bill's first reading and at the meeting I met with Debbie Mahaffy, Sharon Rosenfeldt, who lost her son to child killer Clifford Olson, and Tracey Christie from my own riding, whose daughter Christie Christie was murdered after opening the door of her home to let in a 12-year-old neighbourhood boy.

Speaking with victims like these, one becomes acutely aware of an obligation that this government has to do more for them. We have a duty to ensure that we do everything we can to uphold victims' rights in Ontario. Bill 102 is one more step in that direction. We must put victims and the public first. I ask all members of this Legislature to support this important bill. It is part of this government's initiatives to make our streets safe again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Questions and comments?

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming): I understand there are still to be some speakers from the government side and probably we'll be next, but since we have this opportunity to comment, as I am going to at more length probably being the next speaker, I will say that the Liberal caucus will be supporting this bill.

We accept the points that the government has made that community safety is of paramount importance throughout this province and that this bill goes somewhat to cure some of the ills that are out there. As the minister mentions, our law enforcement officers have been in sort of a legal limbo as to what rights they have in alerting the community as to the release or possibly the movement of a dangerous offender into that community. It's an important matter and we've had too many occurrences of dangerous offenders reoffending not to be able to have a law such as this that would allow the community to be informed that a dangerous person is coming to their community.

There's a real balance to this. Of course, all citizens' rights should be respected. With the amendments that have been brought forward on this bill — and all three parties worked towards bringing these amendments forward — I think we have that balance and I think it's a good piece of legislation.

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): This is one of those evening sittings where it's 7 o'clock on a Tuesday. I mention that because people watching this may think it's the rerun already from this afternoon, but it's not. We're here till 9:30, and I encourage people to watch. They might also think it's a rerun because it's the same old theme being recycled over and over again by this government in terms of them being tough when it comes down to law and order.

A couple of interesting things. I heard both the Solicitor General and his colleague talk about "giving the police the tools they need to protect our community." I'm going to have a chance to speak later too, after Mr Ramsay speaks for the Liberal caucus. Mr Ramsay will be speaking in a couple of minutes. He'll be speaking for an hour or so, and I'll be speaking for at least an hour on this bill and all the related bills that it's part and parcel of in terms of a theme. I'm going to be talking about what it means to give police the tools that they need to protect our society.

We supported this bill from day one. Our caucus of course participated in the committee hearings. They were brief, but there was no objection to that. I think the committee heard from some outstanding members of the community, Alan Borovoy among them, who addressed some concerns about the bill. But the committee also heard that the bill's a fine bill and of course it should be supported, but at the end of day it has about that much to do with protecting the community against crime, that it's really not as dramatic a law-and-order step as the Solicitor General would want us to believe.

We're going to supporting the bill, not uncritically of course. I'm looking forward to speaking to it in a short while.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Thank you very much for the chance to respond to this presentation by the minister, the Solicitor General, and also the parliamentary assistant, the member for Scarborough West.

Community Safety Act, Bill 102: It's certainly refreshing to see a bill come before this House that's so well supported, both by the opposition party and the third party, not to mention so many people in the community. It has certainly been well worked through. My compliments to the minister on this particular bill.

I was a little surprised as the minister was speaking to find that the change of name is a loophole that was being closed. I found it rather hard to believe that in the past by simply changing your name you could escape the consequences of a criminal record. I just took it for granted that would follow through on a name change, that you couldn't just disappear from it that easily, but obviously that loophole was out there for criminals in the past. I find that most unfortunate and certainly not right at all.

I think as we move along, we're finding that victims have had a pretty rough time in the past and here we're giving a safeguard, some rights to victims that are long overdue. Victims have been terribly misused in the past and this is about disclosure. When we came in with the bill back a while ago, many years ago on freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation, it was never the intent that that kind of legislation would be there to protect the criminal. It's unfortunate when that happens.

Again, it's very, very refreshing to see the member from Timiskaming commenting in support of this bill, and the member of the third party. I look forward to the passage of this bill.

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Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I too will be supporting Bill 102, as it is an excellent first step, and certainly the Solicitor General and his parliamentary assistant touched on many, many important points. As the members from Timiskaming and Thorold said, it is but a first step. It is an important step but only a first step. It may be a small step, but any step in the right direction is a good step, so obviously support of this bill must take place by all members of the House.

But you know, in expanding on the bill a little, and I hope to get to speak to it later on, I would suggest that another very, very positive way of ensuring that the Community Safety Act takes place is to ensure that we have an adequate and a happy police force in every town, in every municipality, across Ontario, because if you are a police force that is proud of the job that you are doing and know that people respect and appreciate the very, very dangerous type of work a police officer does, then certainly they will be even more proactive. When we have bills introduced such as Bill 126 and Bill 136, what we see happening is a police force mentality being developed in a negative way, because they feel the government of the day doesn't appreciate the very, very important work they do.

I would take all the steps possible to ensure that police officers across Ontario understand that community safety is extremely important and that this government, as the opposition parties are, is committed to ensuring that we appreciate their fine efforts.

The Acting Speaker: The minister from Leeds-Grenville has two minutes to respond.

Hon Mr Runciman: I appreciate the comments and the input of all of my colleagues on both sides of the House. It is somewhat less than heart-warming but certainly encouraging, I think would be an appropriate word to use, with respect to the support from all parties and representatives of all three parties in this House. It's unfortunate we don't see that level of cooperation on the majority of pieces of legislation that we have to deal with, but so be it.

I do want to thank the members and I want to thank my colleagues and the members opposite for their input as this bill went through the hearing stage. I only want to comment on the remark made by the member from Welland-Thorold with respect to the "getting tough" message he indicated.

I certainly don't want to leave anyone with the impression that the intent of this is simply getting tough. I think the intent of this piece of legislation is to close loopholes and, as the member opposite said, to improve and extend community safety in all communities in this province and to extend that safety especially to vulnerable children, whom we know have been the innocent victims of some very horrific incidents in this province in the past number of years. Because of those terrible crimes, we have moved to do what we can to try and reduce the likelihood of similar occurrences in the future.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member for Timiskaming.

Mr Ramsay: I'm pleased to be able to speak tonight on the third reading of Bill 102. I think, from some of the information that has been imparted through the speeches so far this evening, some of the people watching might wonder why we are at a point today where we're authorizing officials in both corrections and policing to be able to notify communities when a dangerous offender is coming into a certain community, because I think most people would have the experience already that this has been happening.

The reason we're doing this through Bill 102 here in Ontario is that the federal criminal law has been amended to allow federal officials to notify local police forces when a criminal or an offender has been released from a federal institution who satisfies certain criteria, that being a very dangerous offender. That has already taken place. What this bill does is to bring provincial law into line with federal law, so that if and when there is a dangerous offender being released from a provincial institution our corrections ministry officials can notify the local police that that offender is coming to the community. So we're catching up and putting our law in line with federal law.

The pressures obviously came much more quickly to the federal government, as offenders who are the most dangerous are sentenced to incarceration rates of more than two years and therefore offenders who are accused of crimes of extreme violence are sentenced to the federal penitentiary system and therefore fall under their jurisdiction.

What happens is that unfortunately in the history of an offender with what we call recidivism, and that is the repetition of offenders committing crimes, you can find yourself in the provincial system with somebody who maybe has been sentenced for a lesser crime and in this case maybe a non-violent crime, because this person who had been previously convicted and served their time for a violent act finds themselves in the provincial system and our authorities still consider this person a danger, but it just so happens that in this particular offence they were picked up by the police and convicted for something less serious. That does not lessen the fact that this person has an extremely violent record of offences, and therefore it would still be important that the community be notified that this person is dangerous to the community.

Therefore, Bill 102 really brings the provincial law and regulation into line so that our police officials in this province, both the OPP and the municipal police forces, and our correctional services employees are allowed to basically do the same, so that our local police forces or the OPP, if they're the force that is providing security for a certain municipality, are allowed to, in the way they see fit, inform the citizens of the community that a certain offender is coming into that community.

When we had our clause-by-clause study, examination, in our committee, the justice committee, there were several

groups that came forward that were concerned about this bill and felt that we were erring on the side of safety versus the rights of the offender. I think all of us in the committee appreciated some of the points that were being made, and in fact, from that discussion in committee, I would say it was quite refreshing to see that really all three parties were kind of working together on this, trying to find the best balance here, and that the government was open to some of these suggestions and some amendments were made to this bill.

It was rather like a prototype of how things should work in this place. Because, I guess, the topic in itself was non-controversial, all members of this House believed in the goals of this and really in the means of this bill also. So we found a way, through amendments, to make sure that the powers given to correctional and police officials in this bill would not be abused; that instead of just being written in regulation that would come after the fact of the passage of this bill, we have specified through amendment in this bill when it is appropriate for an official from the Ministry of Correctional Services and the same for a member of the Solicitor General's office to offer up any disclosure, and those conditions are that it's of paramount protection for the public, it's the protection of victims of crime.

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In many cases, a victim of crime finds himself or herself having, as they should as a good citizen, to testify in a trial that leads to a conviction of an offender, and sometimes that offender vows to come back after that good citizen who has done their civic duty in coming through to the criminal justice system and testifying as to what happened so that justice can be brought forward. Sometimes that victim has to be protected. That is one of the other protections that is offered here, so that a victim in this case would be notified that a dangerous offender was being released from custody, keeping victims of crime informed of law enforcement, judicial or correctional processes relevant to the crime that affected them.

Up until now, it has really not been the right of the victim to be informed of the progress of the criminal justice system in dealing with the perpetrator of the crime that they were a victim of. This bill now specifies that that's okay, that in order to support that person, the victim of crime should be kept informed of the progress of the disposition of the charged offender. That lays that out so that disclosure of the criminal justice process can be brought forward to the victim.

Another reason is just for law enforcement. If, for instance, a dangerous offender was going to be released into a community, maybe a community that is not usually prepared for this type of offender, that usually doesn't have the type of offence that this offender perpetrated in the past, it would be very prudent to notify that small village force that may be made up of a couple of constables, "By the way, offender X has decided to come to your village, and you should be prepared for that move."

Also for correctional purposes, they would be notified so that the receiving institution in the Ontario penal system would understand how dangerous this offender is. For the total administration of justice, this disclosure can also be made, enforcement of and compliance with any federal or provincial act, regulation or government program, and lastly, keeping the public informed of the law enforcement, judicial or correctional process respecting any individual.

As I said earlier, we are going to be supporting this bill. This one aspect of the bill is very, very important. The second aspect of the bill that the minister alluded to in his opening remarks is also very important because it closes a loophole that offenders found many years ago, whereby if they applied under the Change of Name Act, there was no CPIC search done at the time to see if the person had a criminal record.

Even if it was known, there was no authority for the people at the registrar general's office who are authorized to conclude a change of name to notify people in the criminal justice system, whether it be correctional officials, police or other government agencies, so the criminal record would be amended to show that there is now a new name for this criminal offender. That loophole will be closed with this bill, and we agree that's very important for community safety.

But as my colleague from Sudbury had mentioned, this is but one small step for community safety. We in the Liberal caucus feel there is much more we can do to protect our communities. This is a small step and a good step, and therefore we support it, but we would like to be proactive and bring forward some ideas that we would hope this government would pursue.

What we have seen from this government is really more a punitive reaction to criminality, an approach that most of the academic papers in the criminal justice system would show is not an effective deterrent to criminal offending. From what I've seen so far in the term of this government and also from the Common Sense Revolution and campaign that happened two years ago when the Conservative government won, I think the approach this government is taking is more politically motivated than it is to really get to the heart of the problem.

I think this sort of hard-nosed punitive approach is something that can be very appealing to the general public. It's what we would call in politics a hot-button issue. People are very afraid for their safety, which I guess across the board is kind of a sad situation when most violent crime is actually down in the past few years from what it had been because of better police techniques and other improvements in society. But because we are better informed of all the criminal offences that go on, and I suppose because of the unfortunate spectacular nature of some of the crimes that we hear of, we are better informed of criminal offences in society, and this generates increased fear for our safety.

Unfortunately, it does happen in this business of politics that people take advantage of that and play to the public's fears in order to get support, and taking the hard-nosed punitive approach is one way of approaching that. I would hope that the Solicitor General might really want to

take an opportunity to sit down with the two critics and say that if we're really serious about trying to reduce the amount of criminal behaviour on this province, why don't we take a longer look at this, take a look at what some of the expert literature says today and really try to work together in bringing forward some of the programs that have proven to be effective.

The trouble with this approach is that it doesn't come in short little sound bites. It doesn't sound all that effective and politically strong on television, and it doesn't get accomplished in the two years left of this government, or the term of any government. All the academic research shows that to really get to the heart of criminal behaviour, you have to start to tip the balance between the advantaged and disadvantaged in society.

I don't mean by that that one has to somehow drastically redistribute income in society to try to bring up some of the people who are disadvantaged, but that it's very important to initiate some early childhood intervention programs, some as simple and as universal as a program that has been cut by this government, and that is junior kindergarten. A simple program such as junior kindergarten, an even earlier JK or even nursery school, has a profound effect on the outcome of people's lives.

There have been countless studies, the most famous being the Head Start study in the United States, which for over 30 years tracked the lives of people who had been involved in this study. Basically what they did in this study was have a nursery school and a junior kindergarten class, and they made sure that all of the children in these various communities that were chosen had also regular kindergarten, that there were two and three years of intervention before starting grade 1, regardless of the conditions of the home, the social situation in the home.

They went into some of the poorest neighbourhoods to make sure that those children had at the very beginning, maybe for only two or three hours a day before they got to grade 1, some sort of outside intervention in their lives that would, as society sees it, show them how to behave, how to interact with their fellow children, how to play, starting some academics, starting some simple skills, but basically learning at a very young age those social skills that they don't get from the inattention of a mother who may be absent in the home.

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That sort of program, which was started over 30 years ago, has now shown that people being tracked over that time have less involvement in the social justice system, ie, they are not on welfare as much as other people. They have less involvement in the criminal justice system. They are more successful. They are not, on a percentage basis, into criminality as are people in the same neighbourhoods who were not part of the program. They have higher employment rates. They have better health and are therefore less a burden on the state and/or private insurance plans in the United States.

Just from those two to three years of early childhood intervention, you have a group of people, unfortunately a vast majority of whom were bound to go into those various systems, to slip through the cracks, if you will, who were given the tools to get themselves through school, through the difficult family situation, whatever it was, and get themselves on their feet and self-sufficient and self-reliant.

That's the type of thing I think we should be talking about, rather than just, "All we need to do to take care of these young offenders is give them a swift kick," ie, boot camps. That's sort of the gut reaction we've seen from this government, that if we just take these young offenders and exhaust them all day running them around a track, strict discipline, that's going to somehow cure their criminal behaviour and they will no longer reoffend and all will be well.

That is a very appealing notion, that somehow these kids just didn't get the discipline when they were being brought up in their families, and if we as the state could get hold of them and run them through a 15-week to six-month to nine-month regime of strict discipline, all would be well with the world and these kids would be straightened around and wouldn't reoffend and the world would be a safer place to live in. I wish it was that simple, because if it was that simple, I'd go for it. If the literature showed that it worked, I'd support it.

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): I'll guarantee it.

Mr Ramsay: One of the members says he guarantees it. I have here just about the latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, which compiles every few months the very best of the literature that's available in any particular area of the criminal justice system. What this May edition does is put together the efficacy of boot camps, that is, how efficient are prisons and jail boot camps for changing criminal behaviour?

I must say that the vast body of literature says this is not effective. If it was effective, I wouldn't be making this speech tonight, because I, like every other member in this House, would like to see a great diminishment of criminal behaviour, especially with young offenders. It is frightening to see young offenders enter the criminal justice system, to see young people start to act out and to offend and to wreak havoc in society, to injure, to maim and to kill people, to destroy property and to steal property. We don't want to see young people doing this, but we are seeing that.

What the literature says — and I know some of the government members don't even want to hear this — and in my experience in dealing with young offenders, the vast majority of them are victims in their own right. When you look at the records of young offenders in our institutions, be they young women or young men, many of them have been physically abused as children. Many of them have been sexually abused as children. Many of them, because of this, are acting out in a very inappropriate and dangerous way, and we need to grab hold of them and make sure we can try to work with them in correcting this. Many of them have substance abuse problems that add to their complications and to their offending in society. It's the way they are trying to cope with the problems they have.

What is required from the very beginning is the type of programming I've talked about that Head Start offers. That's as simple as the Minister of Education standing up and saying, unlike what he does say when he stands up, that there shall be junior kindergarten in every primary school in this province. That would be a very good, positive start that wouldn't come out of the budget of the Ministry of the Solicitor General, but I'm sure he would have great support in this House for that sort of program. That is extremely important.

Looking through the literature, it is interesting to note that all of the anecdotal evidence that people have that just the application of a lot of exercise is somehow going to modify criminal behaviour is wrong. I wish it was so, and if it was so, I would say, "Let's have a heavy exercise regime in every institution in this province." If that worked, that would be great; let's go for it. But unfortunately, it's just not that simple and it just doesn't work that way.

In one paper by Mark Correia of the University of Nevada, Reno, "Boot Camps, Exercise and Delinquency," he does an analytical critique of the use of physical exercise to facilitate decreases in delinquent behaviour. The précis of his paper says:

"This article examined those disciplines most relevant to the use of shock incarceration," which is the sort of technical name for boot camps, "criminology, social psychology, psychology and physiology, and drew upon their theoretical frameworks in an effort to apply them to juvenile boot camps. It is argued that available research in these disciplines does not provide a strong rationale supporting the use of exercise to decrease criminality in juvenile offenders."

I'd certainly have to wonder, with papers such as this that have been out for quite a while — in fact this paper, which is fairly recent, cites some very old studies to show that this type of application of exercise is just not the simple solution to reducing the offending frequency of a young offender. In this paper, another paper from 1981 is cited in which exercise has been found to increase the beta endorphins. Anybody who jogs knows that this is correct and that there is a very nice sense of wellbeing when one exercises from the beta endorphins that are released into the brain. "Research suggests that this increase may create a physiological exercise high experienced by physically active individuals, which has been credited with reductions of anxiety, tension, anger, and at times possibly confusion." But the paper goes on to say that the literature does not support any long-term behaviour modifications, especially those behaviours associated with criminality, these being based on low self-esteem, low self-control and low self-concepts.

These are the areas that need to be targeted. You will find, especially with young offenders but probably with adult offenders also, that it is characteristics of low self-esteem, low self-control and low self-concepts that are the problems in a criminal offender, and just giving a strict-discipline, high-exercise regime is not going to cure that. I wish it would. If you would show me the proof for this, I would support it tomorrow, but it doesn't show that it does.

This is really a problem, that we're going down this road thinking this is going to be a panacea and sort of trying to persuade the general electorate — and in our case as politicians, the voters — that somehow the Harris government has the magic bullet to solve juvenile delinquency. It's just not so.

The paper goes on to say that it's shown throughout this analysis that apparent failure of boot camp prisons can be attributed to the lack of any theoretical explanations for why exercise should decrease criminality. Juvenile boot camps have not been shown to be a magic cure-all in reducing criminality. These programs need to be thoroughly re-evaluated, especially with respect to the use of exercise and physical labour to facilitate reduction of delinquent behaviour.

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I'll say to the members over there that I'd like to be a little positive and get some suggestions of what you need.

Interjection.

Mr Ramsay: Wait for it, because I think this is important. In order to fill the boot camp, you've taken some young offenders away from their schooling. People should know that unlike the popular notion that young offenders in provincial institutions are lying around all day watching TV, they go to school. If they are 16 and under they have to go to school, and many up to 18 go to school, because the school board provides that schooling there and they get that training. You disrupt that when you bring them into the boot camp.

What you need in a juvenile camp is some sort of practical skills training. Whether it's automobile mechanics, computer training, let's get some modern skills training so you raise the low self-esteem of those people so they're capable of providing for themselves and don't feel they're vulnerable because they didn't get the attention as children, didn't stay in school, don't have the skills and don't feel they can compete, that the only way they can compete is offending: mugging people and breaking in and destroying property. That's what we have to do, work on low self-esteem and make sure these people have the skills and, maybe for the first time in some of their lives, to show that somebody cares about these people.

I know this isn't a popular approach right now, that a caring approach is the answer. I'm just saying that the literature is showing that is the answer, that early childhood intervention is the way to prevent a lot of criminal behaviour. Even with the very young offenders, to get in there and show that you understand that many of them are victims and get to the root of those problems and then get them on the road to recovery with those problems and get them some skills so they can be self-reliant is very important in their lives.

I hope the minister doesn't start establishing boot camps throughout the province and try to convince people that all is going to be well by doing that, that that's going to be the answer, because that's just not the only answer to this.

While I have my opportunity to talk about the criminal justice system in Ontario, I would like to talk about some other matters that I think would be very important to the criminal justice system in this province.

Before I leave boot camps, I would like to say to the minister that part of the problem with his very rapid introduction of boot camps in Ontario is that he was in such a rush to fulfil this political promise that I think maybe went a fair way to getting this government elected, that somehow they had this magic bullet, in the boot camps, of getting tough with young offenders, that the government made a lot of mistakes on the way of establishing this boot camp. As we all know, it has had a very rough birth. In fact, it probably needs to be reborn, maybe rethought before it gets reborn.

In the minister's haste to bring this about, he decided to shortchange the training that correctional officers usually have running young offender facilities. In the criminal justice and corrections system in Ontario, correctional officers who are going to be working with young offenders go through quite a rigorous staff training at the Bell Cairn centre in Burlington and then they go in for three weeks of practical training with experienced, veteran correctional officers who are used to working with young offenders.

The people who were hired by Camp Turnaround to come to the boot camp went to Bell Cairn for about half the time that correctional officers usually spend there and did not get the practical, hands-on training in one of the Ontario correctional centres for young offenders. So they got up to Camp Turnaround, or Camp Breakout or whatever you want to call it, and probably for many of them the first time they saw a young offender was when he came through the door to be incarcerated in this camp, and they just had some theoretical knowledge about how to handle young offenders.

It wasn't more than a few weeks — in fact, the day before the official opening of the boot camp — that we had a breakout. Two young offenders busted out during the night, escaped and were free until the next day.

Even up till now, in a 32-bed facility being managed by a private company at a cost to taxpayers of $2.4 million a year, with about 33 staff people there, a one-on-one staffing arrangement to young offenders, we now also have six government correctional officers up there guarding the guards, to make sure that young offenders don't escape. We are talking about maybe only 15 inmates at the time of the breakout; they may not even have 15 in there today. There are 33 people inside and six correctional officers outside guarding all this, at an additional cost of $2,400 a day to taxpayers.

This is a monumental failure. Part of the reason is this rush to judgement by the Solicitor General that the boot camp was the answer to all the ills with young offenders, and therefore they'd better get this open fast because in the first two years they wanted to get all their promises in the Common Sense Revolution fulfilled.

I also want to bring up another issue that I brought up in question period last week, what I think is the beginning of a very disturbing trend, that I think is going to be a trend in Ontario, for two-tier policing.

I brought up the case of the town of Dundas, which is served by the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police Force. All the municipalities in the Hamilton-Wentworth region pay a levy to the region to supply policing to the whole region. But the good business people in downtown Dundas, in the business improvement association, had noticed over the last couple of years a 50% increase in break-ins in the downtown area. Not only that, they were beginning to notice the lack of response to those break-ins when they were called in from the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police Force. They were very concerned about this, not only about the great increase in the break-ins, the loss of property, the cost to their buildings and to their insurance, the inconvenience of that, but also the lack of police response to that; and not only to that particular crime but, because of that, the lack of any follow-up that might go towards preventing this increase and future break-ins.

So the business improvement association of Dundas went to the town council to say, "We're not satisfied with the police protection we're getting from the region and we want you to do something about that." The town of Dundas decided, since they couldn't get any more enforcement from the region, that they would hire their own private security guard to give extra policing to the town of Dundas. They had made many calls to the regional police, and the regional police said, "With the amount of money we have in the region, this is all the coverage we can give you." The town of Dundas decided to hire their own.

So now they've got two levels of policing. What is disturbing about this is that not every municipality could afford to do this. Especially with the downloading of police costs now, I think we're going to see many municipalities starting to realize they might not even be able to afford the very basic cost of policing. I'll touch on that in a minute, because that really affects many of the communities I represent and that many of my colleagues represent in northern Ontario, and maybe parts of rural Ontario also.

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What's disturbing about this is that I as a Liberal would say and I hope everybody in this House would say that while we restructure government, there are at least a few core functions for government in society today. Probably on a par with education and health has got to be community safety. The public has to demand that the government retain full responsibility for community safety.

This government has cut $3 million over the last two years from the community safety grants that go to our municipal police forces. If we start to see that ratcheting-down of the resources to our communities for policing, we're going to start to see actions such as that of the town of Dundas in hiring private policing. You might say, "What's wrong with that, if that is a municipal responsibility anyway?"

What's wrong is that in the case of this short-term, $10,000 contract to try to alleviate this particular problem, the town of Dundas has the resources to do this, but not every municipality does. They depend on either OPP policing or maybe in other cases, where they're in regions, on the regional police force to provide policing. If they can't get the increased policing, they're just out of luck and break-ins such as this are going to be increasing. Small business people and homeowners are not going to be able to get the police to respond to calls when this happens, and this is happening throughout the province now. Police are so overworked that they're having to prioritize the types of calls they can only go to. There are calls that in the old days they always used to respond to that they no longer respond to.

One of the examples I gave in a question was an 84-year-old woman in St Catharines. In question period you can't give all the details, but I have the time now, and I was really struck by this. This 84-year-old woman — good for her; she still has her driver's licence — was out driving and went to get her groceries. While coming back from grocery shopping she was in a car accident. My mother's a senior too; she's 83 years old. I know she buys a lot of frozen food because that's convenient and easy. Isn't it wonderful that you can be 83 or 84 and can be self-sufficient and be in your home and provide for yourself? So you take advantage of convenience foods such as that. This woman had a lot of frozen food, and this happened in the summer in St Catharines. She was waiting for the police to respond to the accident she was involved in, which is very understandable because you want to have a police report of your accident to make sure that all the procedures are correct with your insurance. You want to make sure the police respond. Heavens to Betsy, when you're 84 years old, you're not even sure what to do next and all that, you're very upset by this situation and you would like to have the certainty of a police officer coming to render assistance. That's what the police are for.

It was three hours before, in this case, the Niagara Regional Police arrived at the scene in St Catharines. This story was reported in the St Catharines newspaper; there were letters to the editor that followed it. People were really shocked and disgusted that here was this 84-year-old citizen of St Catharines basically stuck in her car, her frozen food thawing and being ruined on a hot August afternoon, waiting for this assistance from the police.

This is the type of concern people in Ontario have, just like our health critic brings forward with people waiting for health services. Sometimes you can't wait for police services. It's very important that the government be front and centre and say that community safety, public safety, the criminal justice system, is one of the prime areas of government and that we're no longer going to be cutting here, that we're going to provide some sort of guarantee to the citizens of Ontario that the police will be there when you need them. I'd like to see that. I'd like the government to make some sort of guarantee, some sort of bill of rights for community safety, that thou shalt be entitled to the response of a police officer if thou hast been offended upon. Excuse the biblical language, but it upsets me that citizens such as this 84-year-old woman now have to wait three hours on a hot afternoon in August when she's involved in an auto accident. That's just not right, and it shouldn't happen in the Ontario we have here, as well-off as we are.

Something's wrong there. If this lack of service continues, we're going to start to see, for more affluent citizens and communities, what we fear in the health care system coming into the criminal justice system, and that is two-tier policing. You'll have the well-off, affluent neighbourhood in a town or community with its own private security service running around, like Westech provides in West LA for the well-off people there. We've already seen this from the American examples. This is the type of thing that's on its way here.

In that question last week I brought forward the other Americanism we're starting to see imported into this country already: the walled and gated community. When people start to fear for their security and their safety, when they don't believe there's adequate policing, they start to search for — and quite frankly, who can blame them, for a senior — a safe community. They start to go to these communities where the ads say, "We provide this extra security and safety." The code words are "peace of mind."

I don't blame those people. When you're older you're not as strong as you used to be. You get more concerned about people breaking in and your own safety. You want to be as safe as you can be. I don't blame people for looking at communities such as that, but not all of us can afford to be in such a community, and quite frankly, I don't want to see Ontario become a series of walled and gated communities, that we all lock each other up from ourselves, afraid of our neighbour, afraid of the person on the street, that we may be invaded at any moment, and afraid that if such happens the police are not going to be there when you need them. That's not the Ontario I believe in, that's not the Ontario I want to see, but I think it is the Ontario we're starting to see develop under the Mike Harris government, and I'm very concerned about that.

I would hope that the Solicitor General would be concerned about that, because I know he's a law-and-order type of guy. We always used to admire him in opposition because he used to go after all the governments, ours included, and the last government, as the tough cop, the law-and-order guy who wasn't going to stand for any disorder in Ontario. I always thought he packed his own piece and wanted to go out there and do it himself. I'm sure he's capable of it, but I know that as a law-abiding citizen he wouldn't do it. Sometimes he scares me in question period. It's a good thing he's law-abiding and staying in here and just passing laws rather than going out and trying to correct it on his own, because that would not be the way to do it.

We're all concerned. I don't want anybody out there to think that any one political party seems to have the one-up on community safety, because all of us here care about that. Maybe we have a different approach about it, but

what we're looking at are the approaches that the vast majority of the literature on these problems today says is the direction we should be going in.

I'd like to get into one other area before I allow one of my colleagues also to speak, and that is police funding. This is a major problem throughout Ontario. When Bill 105, the Police Services Act, brought in the notion that all municipalities should pay for policing, I understood the principle of that and I accept that. I know that historically a vast majority of municipalities in Ontario, through the income tax their citizens pay, have been receiving OPP policing. Over time, those municipalities with a population of over 5,000 have either had to contract with the OPP at local taxpayers' expense or provide their own municipal police force. Certainly there has been an inequity in that system, so I don't blame the government for trying to bring some equality in how Ontarians pay for their policing. We all should be paying our fair share. If I was writing this out, I would be underlining "fair share," because the system the Solicitor General has brought in is the most unfair system I have ever, ever seen. What he has decided to do with those communities that up till now have been relying on OPP service is to assess those municipalities, on a per household basis, a flat fee for policing.

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The trouble with that is that we have now a range in Ontario from Parry Sound district, which depending on your focus is either in southern or northern Ontario — it's kind of in the middle of Ontario. In Parry Sound district, the households there will be required to pay $169 for OPP policing. That's probably pretty good. We had heard that possibly an average price might be around $200. I suppose that's a pretty good price to pay for the superior quality of policing that Ontarians enjoy from the OPP. They're one of the finest police forces in the world, nobody is going to dispute that, and we are well served by them. We should be paying for that service and that's a pretty good price.

But when you start to look and, ironically and unfortunately, go north of Parry Sound, the discrepancy in that per household charge is absolutely alarming. It goes from $169 in Parry Sound to, just 150 miles up the road in through the area I represent, $480 per household in Timiskaming, all the way to, in my colleague's riding of Kenora, $711 per household for OPP policing. I've got to wonder why the grave discrepancy in that household charge. Mr Speaker, I'm sure that if you put yourself in my shoes and represented people who would be paying three or four times as much as the people of Parry Sound, you'd be exercised about this also.

What's doubly galling about this is that during the war years the breweries came to the government of Ontario and said: "We need some sort of efficient system to market beer throughout the province. If we could get this sort of agency developed without any competition, we could guarantee a few things. One of the things we could guarantee would be the same price for the cost of beer in Toronto, Parry Sound and right to the Manitoba border, in Kenora." I'm using this kind of facetious example just to show how the thinking has been in the past by a Conservative government, that somehow it was right and proper and fair that Ontarians pay the same price for a case of beer. I find it absolutely stunning that the Mike Harris government believes that while it's okay, and maybe right and proper, for Ontarians to pay the same price for a case of beer throughout this province, it's not okay for households, regardless of income and how expensive that house is, to pay at least the same average price for policing. Why do we have such discrimination? That's what it is.

Ironically enough, we would find for sure that we would have people of much greater affluence, by and large, and the vast majority of them, living in southern Ontario, in the rich suburbs of many of our major centres, compared to places like Kenora district where the average incomes are much lower, all the statistics are lower when it comes to earning power, unemployment etc. So why are the people of northern Ontario paying $400, $500 and $600 more per household for the same policing than you're going to have in Parry Sound and other rural centres of southern Ontario that receive OPP policing? That's just not right. That's just not fair. I just don't understand why this government feels this is the way to go about bringing forward the cost of policing.

Do we charge people a different rate for other government services in northern or rural Ontario? We do not discriminate or charge people different rates for access to the health care system or the social service system in this province, the education system being another one, but yet for something as vitally important as all these other core government services we deliver to the people of Ontario, this Solicitor General in the Mike Harris government has decided that we are going to have discriminatory rates levied per household, specifically on households in northern Ontario, for policing. That is just not right and that is not fair. Coupled with that, at the same time the government is downloading a lot of charges to municipalities that are going to be transferred through to local tax levies that have never been there before for municipalities.

So while a rural municipality, say, in my district of Timiskaming is now going to be charged an extra $480 per household for policing, those households in many of those rural municipalities are going to find themselves caught up in the downloading of the farm tax rebate to the municipalities. That means the municipalities are going to have to make up for that loss of revenue.

I know, Mr Speaker, you live in a rural municipality and I'm sure you must be concerned about this, because you understand how this system works, that where before the municipality was able to assess the farm land at 100% of the assessment against the mill rate, knowing that the farmer received a grant directly from the provincial government, that no longer is going to take place. Therefore, the township can only assess their mill rate against 25% of the value of that farm land. But where is the township going to make up the rest of that money? They're going to have to raise the mill rate across all other classes of property within that township.

What's happening with that program, with the policing that's coming in, is that in the very township I live in,

Casey township, right above Lake Timiskaming — I was speaking to the municipal clerk the other day — our taxes next year, in four months' time, are going to rise 159%. That's absolutely incredible, but that's the type of tax increase we are facing.

It's because the Minister of Municipal Affairs has not spoken to the Minister of Agriculture or the Solicitor General about all the other downloaded services that are going to our municipalities. In essence what they're doing is reconstructing a building without a blueprint. We agree with some reconstruction. We can always do things better. There's nobody in this House who would stand in their place here tonight and say: "We're absolutely doing everything perfectly here. It's okay, we don't have to change." We know we can do better, and in some areas we can do much better. We're not against restructuring. What we are against is restructuring this municipal building without the blueprint. You don't even know where you're getting it to, because you don't have the plan in place.

Supposedly now in another week finally the Minister of Municipal Affairs is going to give the final costs to the municipalities. This is too late for some municipalities, but better late than never. But why these figures haven't come on is because I think you're going to find that in many cases you're going to have to bail out many of these municipalities. I cannot see the township council of Casey that will be newly elected next year actually passing that bylaw, as we used to around the council table, for a 159% increase. I can't see that happening.

What is going to happen is that many municipalities are not going to contract with the OPP to get the proper standards of policing they require, because they have an option. What they could do is just have the OPP charge them on an on-call basis. In the township I live in I must tell you we have model citizens. We have very few offences going on. Occasionally, we've got somebody going through on the highway; we get a break-in from somewhere else and it happens here. The OPP respond sometimes — not always, but they respond. They're busy and they're underresourced. But our township council has the choice of not paying the $480 per household charge.

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That means we wouldn't get the OPP driving through, but they don't come through our township anyway. We don't have a built-up downtown area or a highly densely populated suburban area with them cruising through the streets. We don't get that anyway. But if ever we should have a major crime in our township, we're in big trouble. If we ever had a murder in our township and the hundreds and thousands of dollars of investigative work that would be entailed from that, we would be in real trouble and our ratepayers would be in real trouble. But many townships are now being faced with this decision and gambling on, if you will, their treasury and maybe even the safety of their citizens, because they don't know how many of our citizens are going to be able to pay the $300, $400, $500, up to $711 per household for safety.

Quite frankly, I don't think safety should be for sale. I don't think that safety protection should only be available to those who can afford it and that our poor neighbourhoods are going to be let go, like the inner-city cores of many major American cities have been let go over the last 30 years. That's just not the Ontario I believe in and that's not the Ontario I grew up in. I never expected that we would be getting to this time and this place where we might get to the point where communities could not afford proper basic policing but might have to gamble with the safety of their citizens and not contract to get the proper policing that is required. That's not the type of world we want to live in here. We pride ourselves, as Ontarians and Canadians, on having relatively safe communities.

I'd say to the viewing public out there that by and large this is a very safe country to live in. While yes, every day the newspaper is full of in some cases very spectacular offences that happen from time to time, by and large the vast majority of our citizens are safe and we are well served by our police departments. But our police departments have to be well-resourced. You can't keep cutting and cutting and cutting.

The secret of policing is having a lot of people in the community, on the ground, like it used to be, some people would say, in the old days when you had the presence of police, not necessarily even in their cars but on the beat, as they used to say, in the streets, in the stores, in the coffee shops. They joke about the police being in coffee shops. That's exactly where they should be. They should be in our stores, in the streets, in all the shops, talking to you and me, getting to know what's happening in the neighbourhood. Get them out of the isolation of their cars. Get more of them and get them into our communities. That's how you create safe communities.

That does cost money and I don't apologize for that. I think that's a core function of government, that public safety has to be up there with education and health care. There's no doubt about it, it's all part of community safety, just as health care is. It is as vitally important. It does cost money. There's no magic bullet. It just takes some effort and it does take resources.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Questions or comments?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): On the comments made by my colleague from Timiskaming, I think two points are really important here. The government tends to forget that when we talk about security of our communities, the important point is that we need to put reliance on community policing. The police need to be tied into our communities in a very real way so they've got their ear to the ground and they understand what's happening in the community and with that information are first of all better able to have citizens partake and participate in making our community safer, but also for them to better understand what's going on.

One of the fears I have is that part of the effect of this government's downloading exercise and the cuts the government has made to various programs at Ministry of Community and Social services, at the Ministry of Health

and whatever, is really adding and fuelling a stronger presence of criminal elements in our community. All members are here in Toronto during the week and on the weekend are back home in our ridings. You notice that in Toronto there are a lot more people on the streets. I'm not saying they're out celebrating and going shopping; we're talking about people who are out on the streets we never used to see there, making us feel a little more insecure about what happens in the community of Toronto.

The point I would make is that the government needs to understand that if you're serious about dealing with crime and you're serious about making our communities safer, you can bring all the bills you want to this House; in the end it comes down to economics. If people have jobs and people have hope and people have somewhere to go during the day, it's a lot easier to make our communities safe. That would be the first point, that the government needs to understand that community policing is really making sure that everybody in the community is plugged in.

On the issue of the OPP, downloaded costs to municipalities, in the six seconds I have left, that is yet to come home to roost to the Tory government. They don't understand what this means politically.

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): I'm pleased to make some comments on the remarks by the member for Timiskaming. I want to say, at the risk of hearing from my own colleagues later, I'm sure, that he is one of my favourite members, because he has a habit of sticking to the topic and he's very earnest in his remarks. Tonight he gave a very in-depth analysis of a lot of issues, some of them more on topic on Bill 102 and some of them not, but they certainly were in the general area of community crime issues and particularly community safety.

Of particular interest, his comments in regard to the issue of publicizing offenders' names were very well made. It was obvious that this member had read the bill in depth. He served on the committee and was involved in the discussions clause by clause and some of the changes that were brought about. As usual, his approach was not partisan; it was more a matter of trying to be practical and trying to assist the government in looking at some of the issues in community safety. I'm sure the minister will want to consider some of his recommendations in regard to community policing.

I know some of the issues he has raised in respect to township-by-township and municipality-by-municipality policing are also present in my riding, but I did think in his comments he may have sold the bill short a little bit in that this is a bill that is designed to bring into effect recommendations made by a coroner's jury. In that regard, it is one that's very much needed and one that's long overdue. It's one that focuses on public safety. It's not designed to be a huge get-tough bill; it is one that, as the minister said, is very practical in nature. But they were very good remarks.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott and Russell): I want to congratulate my colleague from Timiskaming. No wonder he's the critic for the Solicitor General. He talked about security or increasing the safety of our citizens in our communities; it is very important at this time. He has touched some points that should affect all the people in this province.

When we're saying that we are going to have some second-class citizens, when we look at what it is going to cost to get OPP service purchased by the municipalities — it varies from $106 to $711.84 per household — it's unbelievable. I'm sure the member just across the way mentioned that the Solicitor General will take a hard look at it. Let's hope he will, because I have all the figures here, how much it is going to cost for different ridings or different counties in our province. It varies too much. If I look at the district of Manitoulin, it's going to cost $360. If I look at the district of Muskoka, $203. It varies too much when I say the highest is $711. At the present time, the town of Smiths Falls has its own police force. The OPP submitted a quote after reviewing the services the municipality or the town will require and there's no way the OPP will be able to provide this service.

At the present time in my own riding I've seen people who have had break-ins being visited by the OPP three days after. I don't blame the OPP. It's because there are no resources available at the present time. When they say Prescott and Russell, the cost for Clarence and Rockland is $1.3 million. There's no way they're going to be —

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Further questions and comments.

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Mr Kormos: I too appreciated the contribution to this debate by the member for Timiskaming. I agree that he was quite focused in his comments, so much so that when I have the opportunity to speak in a few minutes, I'm going to paint perhaps a broader picture than my colleague from Timiskaming did. While he addressed the specifics of Bill 102 with a narrow focus, I quite frankly intend to put it into the larger picture.

One of the problems we've got here is that this bill is being touted as part of this whole law-and-order campaign on the part of this government. I think one should find that whole campaign a little questionable; in fact, one should regard it with some cynicism, and that is to say, is this government interested merely in exploiting some of the very real fears that are out there in a whole lot of communities among a whole lot of people at the expense of any real and direct attack on crime and criminal behaviour?

I think that's a question many Ontarians are asking increasingly as they see this government defunding police forces, as they see, as the member for Timiskaming pointed out, communities resorting to privatized policing, be it a particular neighbourhood or a particular business district, knowing full well that the inadequacy of police funding has left public police forces, municipal or regional police forces, incapable of responding appropriately to calls for their assistance.

This government has a lot of answers to give to a lot of valid questions about whether it has a real commitment to dealing with the serious problem of crime in our communities and the impact it has on families —

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Ramsay: I wish I could change the procedure of this House and surrender my time, but I know I can't, to a fellow member because I really would owe it the member for Sudbury, who I know had an important contribution to make to this particular bill that he wanted to put on the record. I just got so involved and interested in this bill that I didn't allow him some time. So I owe him that time another time because I know he's very concerned with community safety and is on top of those issues in Sudbury.

I appreciate the comments from the other members, commenting on my speech. It's nice when we can come together in this House and actually all agree on a bill. That doesn't happen all that often, but obviously in this case it's a concern we all share and the bill presents a remedy we all basically share also. While it's not perfect, I think it's what we need at this time and so therefore unreservedly we support it.

I think of many of the core functions that we are responsible for at the provincial level. Nothing can be as important as community safety. How our criminal justice system works, how our police interact with citizens in our community is a very important function of government, and in a society the way we're developing it becomes a more and more important function of government. We, as our responsibility, must ensure that we always endeavour to make sure that the men and women who risk their lives on a daily basis to protect all of us are properly supported, properly financed, so they can do the jobs to protect Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Kormos: As I indicated earlier this evening, the Solicitor General can expect support for this bill from every member of this caucus, the New Democrats, and I'm confident, as has been indicated by Liberal critic Mr Ramsay, the member for Timiskaming, he can expect their support for the bill as well.

I want to express my gratitude to Frances Lankin from Beaches-Woodbine and to Marion Boyd because they sat in on the committee for the two days the committee heard submissions and then dealt with clause-by-clause. I of course was in estimates with the Attorney General, putting questions to the Attorney General about the family support plan and Bill 82.

I suppose I'm especially grateful that it is the Solicitor General who's the sponsor of this bill. If it were, for instance, the Attorney General who was the sponsor of this bill, this bill would receive third reading and would still be sitting around for nine, 10 and 11 months without ever being utilized or applied, without any of its sections being given effect, as the Attorney General has of course, as you know, done with Bill 82 where the Attorney General talks a big game but simply can't deliver.

I'm grateful that it's the Solicitor General because I'm confident that the Solicitor General, with a far higher level of competence than the Attorney General, is going to ensure that once this bill receives third-reading passage, it's put into effect in relatively short order, very promptly.

Of course the Solicitor General and his colleague from Scarborough West, Jim Brown, paired up, teamed up on the introduction, the preliminary comments about the bill. It seems that the member for Scarborough West got sidetracked a little bit. The Solicitor General's interpretation of the impact of the bill I don't think anybody takes quarrel with.

There are a couple of things that should be noted: one in so far as this permits the Ministry of Correctional Services to release information about persons whose sentences perhaps are not over but who are being released on parole. Let's understand and point out, as did many of the commentators during the course of the one day of hearings, that we're dealing here with provincial institutions, so the persons about whom information is going to be given to the community are persons who have received custodial sentences of two years less a day. You're not going to find a large number of the serious and dangerous types of offenders who have been talked about in that category of people. You're going to find that will be the rarer occasions rather than the more common occasions.

The Change of Name Act: Not wanting people to avoid the burden of a criminal record by changing their name, who can quarrel with that? One also has to understand, however, that people can use any name they want. People don't have to undergo a formal change of name to adopt a nom de plume as such. Obviously, what this will do is cause people who are disinclined to use their real names to simply pursue other avenues or other ways of obtaining identification or drivers' licences under an assumed name. The fact is that changes of name have always been published in the Ontario Gazette in any event, so were always capable of being reviewed and being public matters.

Similarly with the power that's given to police. I suppose the one concern there is: There were some questions raised about this, in particular by Alan Borovoy, who made submissions to the committee. As you know, Alan Borovoy, highly regarded general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, had some concerns about exactly what it is that's going to be released by way of information and on what basis, what criteria.

There had been the suggestion, a very good one, and for the life of me I don't know why the Solicitor General's ministry would not have adopted the proposition that Mr Borovoy made and that the New Democratic Party moved by way of amendment, because all this does is relieve the authorities from the sanctions or controls of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That's all it does. It creates an exception to that particular piece of legislation, and not unimportantly, I understand. Example after example has been cited of a dangerous offender released into an unsuspecting or unaware community such that people can be victimized again.

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I ask at the same time — this where I think the Solicitor General may be playing the law-and-order card a little too strongly — how does the mere release of the information about that person protect the woman asleep in her bedroom, accessible through a balcony sliding door, from the rapist who is intent on committing another rape? I don't

think that in itself carries with it a whole lot of protection. It's a little troublesome.

You should know that Mr Runciman was the beneficiary of some remarkable press recently. It was in the Toronto Star, of all places. Considering the things that hackers can do with the Internet and so on, it could have been some bright young minion in his bureaucracy who slipped this into the Star's computer on a late Sunday night, because he was the beneficiary of what I perceived as very complimentary press in the Toronto Star, with some shortcomings. Unlike his colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing — remember the story about him and the dog? What was it, Tory or Puffy? It was a Lhasa apso, I think. Here is the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who can't even bring himself to own a Canadian dog; he has to get a Lhasa apso. I suppose that would be like the Minister of Trade driving a Mazda or a Datsun. The article about the Solicitor General didn't have some of the warm, comfy things his colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing had. There was no Bob Runciman sleeping with his dog; maybe it was edited out. But it was an incredibly flattering article, especially in the context of the Toronto Star, which isn't exactly a pro-Tory newspaper by any stretch of the imagination.

Interjection: Who wrote it?

Mr Kormos: I looked, and it wasn't Christina Blizzard who wrote it; it was Jane Armstrong. As I say, I was quite impressed by it.

What it did dwell on was the Solicitor General as a law-and-order person, tough on crime, and no two ways about it. I suppose it was welcome press after the fracas at Camp Getaway, Camp Runaway, or the various other names that have been applied to it, where the staff were oh so kind as to leave a van at the exit door for these young offenders to drive away in.

I'm also told that the van contained a whole lot of the paraphernalia that was to be used for the opening ceremonies the next day: folding chairs and disposable glasses for the champagne. I'm told that the van was filled with all this paraphernalia to celebrate the grand opening the next day.

In the aftermath of that sorry affair, the Solicitor General at one point, with great frustration, publicly said: "You don't understand. These kids are hard to handle. They're an unruly bunch." Well, of course they are. They're young offenders. What are you going to do? Go raid some of our high schools and take all the Ontario scholars and put them in boot camp so you get kids who won't be unruly, won't be hard to handle, won't be unmanageable? These are kids who need supervision and need some direction.

The government, with its boot camp philosophy, its boot camp mentality, its exploitation of a belief, mythical, mind you, that there is an increase in crime — it was interesting with the Attorney General the other day in estimates. The Attorney General opened his comments by talking about the belief that crime is rising. He was very careful. It was a prepared speech. Of course I noted that: The Attorney General was very careful to talk about the belief that crime is rising. I said, "Attorney General, what's the reality?" The Attorney General conceded in the estimates committee that crime in fact, although not a dramatic decline, has been on a decline. I was concerned and troubled by a government that would want to exploit and perpetuate the myth rather than understand where the decline comes from and the wherefore and the why.

I suppose if you're really going to talk about crime in the community, you do things like — I remember that when they were Toronto city councillors, Barbara Hall and Marilyn Churley did community audits. They used community members, people in respective neighbourhoods. I'm told that Marilyn Churley and Barbara Hall — of course Barbara Hall is the mayor of Toronto now and Marilyn Churley is the member for Riverdale — took people on tours of their neighbourhoods, on tours of their communities, identifying areas that were perceived as being dangerous, where somebody might be more capable of being victimized, addressing some very basic things like the absence or presence of, let's say, street lighting.

So simple, so fundamental, yet at the same time what a wonderfully refreshing way to address the issue of crime. You're not talking about it after the fact then, are you? You're not talking about locking them up for however long after the deed is done, after the victim has been victimized, after the injury has been imposed, and sometimes very seriously. You're talking about a truly preventive approach to crime, one which is far more productive at the end of the day than any number of boot camps, than any number of tough methods.

A comment was made earlier — and I know it has great spin — by the speaker who succeeded the Solicitor General, who said, "By God, if the feds are going to be soft on crime, it's up to the province to make up for their deficiencies." We've heard that before from these guys. Once again, in those same estimates a couple of weeks ago, the Attorney General came in talking a big line about the Young Offenders Act. I very specifically recall the Attorney General saying, "We need changes to the sections of the Young Offenders Act which concern the taking of statements from young offenders," because the hurdles there, the incredible barriers that exist to the police were such that too many young offenders were beating their raps and were walking away because the statements ended up being not admissible and the young offender ended up never getting tried on the merits of the case.

I thought, "That's an interesting proposition," because I remember back to the beginnings of the Young Offenders Act, when the police and all sorts of people had problems understanding how far one could go as an interrogator, as an interviewer, as a police officer, and yes, there were occasions were statements were ruled inadmissible because the rules hadn't been followed by the interrogating police officer, and you had courts of appeal interpreting and analysing particular pieces of legislation, especially as they applied to statement-taking, but it seemed to me that in relatively short order the problems were resolved. The police learned what was expected of them. A whole lot of people were resistant to the legislated rules for statement-

taking, not that they were all that different from the traditional procedures, but everybody adapted.

So I said to the Solicitor General — no, the Attorney General. Sorry, Solicitor General, because to even mention you in the same sentence as the Attorney General would do you a great injustice. I said to the Attorney General, who was on his law-and-order campaign, "Tell me what it is about the Young Offenders Act and the sections that govern the taking of statements" — a confession; that's what we're talking about — "that need changing." I asked, "Is it the requirement that a young offender be advised of his or her right to retain and instruct counsel without delay?" and the Attorney General said no. I said: "Okay. Is it the requirement that a young offender be advised of their right to have a parent or some other adult present?" The Attorney General said no. I wasn't going to embarrass anybody by suggesting that maybe the Attorney General advocated beating the daylights out of young kids to lure confessions out of them, but that in its own right would make a confession or admission inadmissible.

So I said, "Attorney General, please, exactly what part of the Young Offenders Act is it that you would want to see changed?" The poor Attorney General, with some — it wasn't quite resignation, but with some frustration, said, "I'm not really sure of exactly what sections."

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It left me with the distinct impression that the Attorney General really doesn't have any specific — he talked a big game about going to the feds and leaning on them and getting the Young Offenders Act amended so statements could be more readily taken. The Attorney General doesn't know what he's talking about. He's playing the YOA card; he's playing the fear-of-crime card.

None of us should ever tolerate crime or the prospect of crime. I don't think there's anybody in this Legislature, anybody in this province, who doesn't think we should be tough on crime. But the real question is, how do you go about doing it? Do you deal with it after the fact? Do you seek out longer and longer and longer sentences? One of the considerations in sentencing for many people — it seems to me that some judges, if not all judges, take it into consideration — is the preponderance of a particular type of criminal activity. Heck, then shoplifting should draw the longest sentences, because it's probably the single most frequently committed crime. If you're going to use imprisonment as deterrence, well, by God, let's really sock it to shoplifters.

Of course, that's an absurd proposition. Everybody knows there are far more serious offences, although not with the same frequency as shoplifting, but which carry with them far more cost to the community, to individuals, to the victims and, sadly, to the families of those victims.

You were here last Thursday, Speaker, so you recall that we dealt with a Tory private member's bill, the issue of a week —

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: No, that was the boating. We dealt with that bill too, that you lose your driver's licence upon impaired driving of a boat.

We talked about a victims of crime week. It was acknowledged that it was an entirely symbolic gesture, but it served — I recall listening to the other comments. One of my own very short comments was to the effect that upon having this victims of crime week, let's use it as an opportunity to reflect on, yes, the tragedy of violent crime and the tragedy it imposes upon the victims, their families and upon even the communities those people are from. But let's also start talking about ways we address crime in our community.

Once again, I go back to boot camps, privatized boot camps, of course. I'm told, and I don't know whether it's still going on, that the Ontario taxpayer is investing a whole lot of money in the new Tory boot camp up Barrie way, because they've had to call in correctional officers from the Ministry of Correctional Services to sort of guard the private sector guards to make sure that the private sector guards don't get lured into permitting getaways, like was done the night before the scheduled grand opening of Mr Runciman's boot camp up Barrie way.

The government says the way to go is tougher jail sentences, longer jail sentences, more of them probably, and privatize; let the private sector do it. I tell you, I disagree with the Solicitor General when it comes to the prospect of privately run jails. I think it's far too important a program and institution in our community to have them run on a for-profit basis. I think the experiences at Camp Getaway a couple of weeks ago illustrate that oh so clearly.

I think we had also better be concerned and understand that the boot camp, the jail, the tough punishment comes only after the crime has already been committed. It comes only after the hurt and the pain and the injury have already been imposed.

Let me tell you this: I think an investment in junior kindergarten, knowing the benefits it brings, would probably go a lot further in preventing crime at the end of the day than two or three or four times that investment in get-tough boot camps, which occur after the fact. Yet this government had no qualms in abolishing junior kindergarten here in the province of Ontario: another attack on kids. What's new? We've witnessed two-years-plus of it. This government had no qualms about abolishing junior kindergarten, with the incredible benefits that are attached to it.

This government had no qualms about abandoning your sons and daughters who aspire to post-secondary education, because it has done that with its new tuition increases and the cost it's handed down. That doesn't mean kids won't be going to university. Rich kids are going to be going to university, but not the children of some of those people I was with last Thursday night, some of those 600-plus CUPE workers down at the plumbers' hall who gathered to prepare some strategy around Bill 136. The people who are cleaning staff, the people who are nursing aides in seniors' homes and people who are custodian staff in schools, their kids are the ones who are going to be denied

the right to go to university. I think some investment in ensuring universal access to post-secondary education may well go a lot further to preventing crime in this province of ours than any number of high-priced private boot camps, which have some popular appeal.

People don't like the proposition of criminals who are sentenced to jail being coddled, if you will. The Solicitor General showed those inmates. He took away the $10 and then the $5 allowance they received each week to buy things like toiletries and cigarettes and so on. Mind you, he didn't care about the fact that this would make it all that much more difficult for correctional officers to police those facilities because of the new underground markets, the black markets, and the potential for thievery and extortion that this would generate in a jail, where modest things become valuable commodities, where a package of cigarettes can acquire a significant value.

Quite frankly, I much prefer the attitude of people like Marilyn Churley and Barbara Hall when they said it isn't enough simply to deal with crime after the fact. They weren't alone in this endeavour. They relied on and involved the members of their community. That's the kind of people they are. That's the kind of person Barbara Hall is. She doesn't dictate from on top. Rather, she seeks out from among the grass roots people in neighbourhoods and people in her community to become involved in that type of partnership.

I suppose it's a partnership that she was involved with back when the now member for Riverdale and Barbara Hall were out doing these community audits that I read about at the time and that I've been told about since by a number of people who remember them. This evening alone, I spoke with a woman who had been involved in these, who understood that this was a community response, a grass-roots response to the problem of prospective crime and who understood that this is the kind of leadership that Barbara Hall gave and continues to give and that from time to time the member for Riverdale gives. I quite like that approach.

I mentioned early on about how grateful I was that this was the Solicitor General's bill and not the Attorney General's bill. You've got to talk about the ability of this government — any government at any given point in time, but in this case, this government — to administer the responsibilities that are given to it. Although Bill 102 — I was thinking of Bill 82, which is why I almost said 182. I think I might mention Bill 82 in just a second.

Bill 102 is a modest piece of legislation. People earlier today said: "Here you've got eight, nine pages of legislation. How are you going to talk about that for an hour?" I was worried that perhaps I might find myself without further comment. But then I understood that Bill 102, although a narrow issue in itself, is really part of this broader approach, and a failed approach, I tell you, by this government in its dramatic but ineffective handling of the issue of so-called law and order.

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The member for Timiskaming spoke about policing. Let me speak about policing for a little while myself. Down in Niagara region we've got one of the largest police forces in all of Ontario, and I know the Solicitor General is familiar with that police force. He has been down there at events that I've been at. I've got to tell you, I have the highest regard for the Niagara Regional Police Force, the highest regard for the women and men who serve in it, who protect their community and the people in that community.

I also have a whole lot of concern, though, and the Solicitor General should too. All the amendments in the world to the Change of Name Act aren't going to resolve the problem that policing has had foisted upon it, the crisis that has been imposed upon police forces across this province by this government. This is what bothers me. This government talks a big game about law and order, but when it comes time to deliver, we get oh so very little. We've witnessed, and continue to witness, declines in resourcing of police forces, the Niagara Regional Police Force among them.

The member for Timiskaming made but one reference to a scenario down in St Catharines. He was very careful not to blame the Niagara Regional Police, and I'll join him in that 100%. You can't fault the cops down in Niagara for what have become increasingly longer response times.

The fact is that policing is a labour-intensive activity. That's the big-ticket item, and I don't begrudge police officers their salaries. I'm concerned and I hope the Solicitor General soon will address — I'm told, Solicitor General, that the Ontario Provincial Police have been waiting some months now for their contract negotiations to bear some fruit, for them to see some results of the negotiations with this government. They've dropped considerably, they tell me, in where they rank in the province in terms of salaried police officers. One mentioned down to around 27th in the ranking.

Solicitor General, surely — like the Jane Armstrong article in the Star says, you're a law-and-order guy. Gosh, was it one of the Liberal members who said — let me see what it says right here. "He's a passionate member who stands up for what he believes." That's what Chris Stockwell said about him. I'm not sure that Chris Stockwell would say that about all the members of the Conservative caucus. I'm not sure that he would say that about all the members of the Conservative cabinet. Don't forget, "He's a passionate person." I'm not sure he'd even say that about the Premier, but he says it about Bob Runciman, the Solicitor General.

They speak of him in glowing terms. They speak of him as being most committed to policing, and I'm inclined to believe it. I've known the Solicitor General from when he was a critic over here, when he was a member of the third party. I've known him for a long time and I have no doubt that he is no more pleased about the failure for there to be a contract with the Ontario Provincial Police in this province than I am or than OPP officers are.

But the sad reality is that at the end of the day it's Mike Harris and the backroom boys — I suppose an occasional woman but, by and large, boys — who are calling the shots. Because of an attitude of a Premier, you've got in

some respects a lame duck Sol Gen here, one who means well and would like to do his very best, but a Solicitor General who gets his marching orders very much from the Premier's office.

You've got Niagara Regional Police officers increasingly being reduced in numbers rather than increased as they ought to be because of the growing population, because of the fact that it's a border community which has all the problems that border communities have: incidents of illicit drug trafficking which again are related to being in a border community. There's the casino in Niagara Falls, and although there are some police officers dedicated to the casino, probably the biggest single spinoff from the casino has not been the trickle-down by way of business but has been the crime that flows. It's the type of criminal activity that's attracted by casinos and as well by the big crowds that casinos like that one attract.

The Niagara Regional Police are becoming increasingly concerned about lengthier and lengthier response times. In many instances now they have pared away the level of services they provide so there are certain things to which the police simply won't respond. If it's a matter, like you heard about, of the octogenarian woman whose groceries melted after being involved in a fender-bender — and it took the police three hours to respond — in many of those types of cases you don't even expect police to respond. In fact the Niagara Regional Police will tell you, "Go home and call it into the office so you can get an incident number you can use with your insurance claim." Basically, the police are merely accommodating you. They have no intention of pursuing an investigation, simply because there are not enough police officers to go around.

Let me tell you what one senior police officer told Niagara region approximately a year ago, that is, that police forces like Niagara region have been forced into outright mistruths with the public. For months and months at a time, for instance, break-and-enters simply aren't investigated. If the victim calls up and says, "What's happening?" they'll be assured by somebody in CIB that the file is in the course of being investigated or examined, but all that is is a little bit of fluff designed to put the people off, designed to let them think that somehow something is happening with their break-and-enter file, but in fact nothing is.

Do you think the criminals don't know that? You bet your boots they know it. Criminals down in Niagara know that a break-and-enter is unlikely to ever undergo a thorough police investigation. Attendance at the scene of a break-and-enter is becoming more and more difficult, and that's an initial attendance. Police know that you blow on some fingerprint powder, and as often as not, they do it just for public relations with the homeowner, so the homeowner feels good about thinking there's a television-style investigation taking place.

Again, I tell you, the criminals know it. As often as not, if there's a resolution to a series of break-and-enters, it's because a confession was lured out of one of the parties, who then, for better or worse, turned in all of his cohorts in crime. The police have acknowledged publicly that they are so stretched in terms of their time that investigative work is becoming scarcer and scarcer. That's in addition to these protracted response times. That's not what the public had in mind when they voted for this government. I think they were sold a bill of goods. This government, once again, talks a big game about law and order, but at the end of the day simply doesn't deliver.

In this case, it's not bad legislation, it's fine legislation. It's fine to good, but how much it's going to do to prevent crime in Ontario is very, very questionable. What good does it do to publish the name of a paedophile if you don't have police officers in a position to respond to a telephone call identifying that particular paedophile in the area of, let's say, a school yard or a playground? What good does it do to have the public know who that person is if the police don't have the resources?

The peculiar thing is that both the Solicitor General and his colleague from Scarborough somewhere, Jim Brown, talked about giving the police the tools they need to protect our society, to protect our community. The fact is, this government has been either breaking the tools or taking away the tools the police need to protect our communities. Cops know it, members and citizens of communities across this province know it and, worst of all, the criminals know it.

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Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Well, they do. They know increasingly that there are days during the week when you have so few police officers out on the road, you've got huge areas of the Niagara region with literally a couple or a few police officers available to be dispatched to an incident. Again, it's not a big secret. The police know it; they know it's a problem. The public know it; they know it's a problem. And yes, the criminals know it, and for them it's like a holiday.

This is not an environment that discourages crime. This government is creating an environment that I am convinced will encourage crime, will facilitate crime, where with all the patch-up in the world Bill 102 is not going to undo the serious damage they have done.

Let's talk about the real crimes. I indicated my pleasure that it was the Solicitor General who had carriage of this bill and not the Attorney General. Here's our Attorney General, the chief law officer of the province, and what kind of message does this government give out? On the one hand, it wants to talk law and order. What's it saying to the scofflaws who don't support their kids, the defaulters? What is the government saying to them by its abandonment of the family support plan and by its failure to implement Bill 82 — you know, more tools?

This language is consistent; it pops up over and over again. You had the Minister of Education and the Minister of Municipal Affairs talking about toolboxes and giving the municipalities tools. We're starting to get an idea of what they're talking about as we witness Bill 136, notwithstanding what so far appears to be some major capitulation by the Minister of Labour to the point where, my God, I read in the Toronto Sun, in Linda Leatherdale's

column, that there are some right-wing groups calling for Witmer's head, that's she has abandoned some of these major corporate cartels with her capitulation on Bill 136.

This government has found itself in a very peculiar position. You know the groups I'm talking about, the little groups — I won't use any adjectives, but what are some of the groups?

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Ontarians for Responsible Government.

Mr Kormos: Ontarians for Responsible Government, the billboard people.

Mr Martin: The Canadian national coalition —

Mr Kormos: Those things, yeah. They're calling for her head. They feel they've been betrayed, that Elizabeth Witmer has capitulated in the face of the promise by organized labour. I found that more than a little interesting.

But in any event, we found out that the toolbox, the tools for municipalities, are still very much going to be in Bill 136. If you listened to the Minister of Labour today addressing the committee, her wealthy Bay Street friends are going to be okay at the end of the day; no two ways about it. I mention that because of the language being used by the Solicitor General and by his colleague the member for Scarborough West. They talk about this Bill 102 being the tools the police need to protect our community, to protect our society.

The tools that cops need are adequate resources so they can properly staff their shifts and the platoons working those shifts, Solicitor General. Those are the tools that police officers need. The tools that police officers need mean having adequate staffing so that police can respond promptly to a request for assistance or to the report of a crime or to a crisis wherein life and limb could well be imperilled, so that they can respond promptly and can respond in sufficient numbers that their safety is being protected, that they are not being drawn into situations where they are vulnerable and become at risk of attack on themselves. Those are the tools they need.

Bill 102, while it's a bill that warrants — we don't want criminals changing their names under the Change of Name Act and then carrying on the rest of their lives without carrying the burden of their criminal record. Of course not. We don't want what are truly dangerous offenders being released into the community without those communities being aware.

Hearken back, though. I got a call from out of province last week about the Victims' Bill of Rights. Again, this is your colleague the Attorney General's Victims' Bill of Rights. I cited it as a laudable piece of legislation. I think you'll agree with me, Speaker. But I said it was mentioned far more frequently in the House in the context of the violation of it than in the context of adherence to it.

Again, it was so slick. It was all part of the law-and-order stuff. Yet there have been more occasions, and specifically the member for St Catharines, Jim Bradley, and I have occasion after occasion to bring to the Attorney General's attention violations of the Victims' Bill of Rights, which includes a requirement that in the course of prosecution and/or resolving charges with an accused, the victim have an inherent role.

The prospect of advising a victim that their assaulter, their assailant, is going to be released back into the community isn't in itself repugnant. What is noteworthy is that, just as with the Victims' Bill of Rights, there is no recourse for the victim who wasn't appropriately advised even when it's a right without a remedy. What we have here with Bill 102 vis-à-vis the permission given to police services and to the Ministry of Correctional Services to release information about a perpetrator, an assailant, would appear, just as the Victims' Bill of Rights does, to create some rights for the victim, but they are rights that are accorded a victim without any remedy. That is to say, how does the victim ensure enforcement of that obligation to him or her by the police authorities or by the corrections authorities?

I suspect we are liable to find Bill 102 — I shouldn't say "suspect." I fear that we may find it referred to, just as with the Victims' Bill of Rights, as often in the context of it not being adhered to or being misused or abused as not.

One of the other questions that came up was the criteria that will be used. One of the things that bothered me was that Alan Borovoy made some very sound suggestions to the committee, which were then reflected in a motion presented by way of an amendment by the New Democrats. That is that there be the utilization of a judge's order before information is contemplated being released by the police services boards or by correctional services, that there be a judicial review. This was at the suggestion of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. It was presented by way of an amendment and turned down flat by the parliamentary assistant who represented the minister at the hearings.

This, I should tell you, Speaker, is the new parliamentary assistant. The parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General used to be Gary Carr, the member for Oakville South, but you'll recall that back during the Bill 84 hearings, when this government was putting it to firefighters here in the province, Gary Carr, who I've known for almost as long as I've known the Solicitor General — Gary Carr is one of the bright lights among a pretty dim group over in those Tory back benches, yet what happens to Gary Carr? Again, he had been the Solicitor General's parliamentary assistant. Gary Carr found himself being a little too concerned about the nature and the direction of Tory government policy. I'm not going to repeat to you the things Gary Carr had to say about the Premier and the government. They've been said often enough. In fact, they've been published often enough. Gary Carr didn't say them before he got ousted as the Solicitor General's parliamentary assistant; he said them afterwards. Gary Carr, who unlike some of his fellow ousted-out people kept his comments entirely within caucus but, I should tell you, during the Bill 84 hearings was showing some attention to the firefighters who were coming, found himself out, replaced by Bob Wood.

2100

I suppose I have nothing personal against Mr Wood, but read the transcript of the committee hearings. It's two days: one day of submissions, one day of clause-by-clause. I have nothing personal against Mr Wood but, I tell you, as the parliamentary assistant he wasn't quite as responsive as he could have been to some of the questions and certainly I don't think was anywhere near as effective as Gary Carr would have been had Gary Carr still been the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General.

I mentioned Linda Leatherdale in the Toronto Sun and her reporting that some of these groups, the billboard people of one ilk or another, are looking for Liz Witmer's head. You should have heard what some of the Tory backbenchers were saying last Thursday afternoon. They clearly hadn't been briefed about the announcement, or at least the specifics of the announcement, that the Minister of Labour and her Premier, Mike Harris, were going to be making in the House. Some of the Tory backbenchers were just hopping. I heard them. By God, they figured they had really been sold out. They were worried: "What are we going to tell our small gaggle of supporters back home now? We promised them we were going to take Sid Ryan out behind the barn and give him a darned good thrashing." Some of them have been saying that to their constituents back home, and all of a sudden their Minister of Labour capitulates, says: "No way. I ain't taking on public sector unions. There are just too many people, and those people are too committed."

They are like the people I talked to at the plumbers' hall last Thursday night, wonderful people: custodians from schools, people working in health care, people working in transfer-payment agencies, a lot of them new Canadians, immigrant people who have taken it for a whole lifetime and have decided they aren't going to take it any more, least of all from these guys. And Liz Witmer, it appears, had to back down. I'm not sure yet. It remains to be seen. We'd still like to see the amendments.

Again, it's unfortunate. There was one amendment put to the committee on Bill 102 which I think would have provided the penultimate safeguard. What they've done now is they have left it up to local police services boards to determine the standards or the guidelines by which police departments will gauge themselves when it comes to deciding what information to release, and about whom. One of the concerns I had initially and that my colleagues certainly had and that a whole lot of people out in the community had was that the power as it was in the bill before amended was a pretty blanket power that could have included the power to release information about victims. Think about it, the prospect of a victim's location, whereabouts, personal data being released. Again, that wasn't the spirit of the bill; I understand that. But the door was wide open.

Now they've delineated and set a schedule for disclosure by both correctional services and police. They have set out an eight-point requirement that will control somewhat the reasons for the release of a particular bit of information. But they turned down the prospect of using a member of the judiciary as a protection of, I suppose, individual and public rights. The process as suggested was as simple as this: It was a matter of going to a judge, the way one would go to a judge for a search warrant — a search warrant is as good an example as any — and saying, "This is the information we want to release, and this is why," and having a judge weigh that against the act to determine whether or not that is what the act was intended to do.

I was looking at that Toronto Star article again about the Solicitor General.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: No, we're okay. I hadn't highlighted any of it.

There was a malcontent out in the Brockville area. That's where the Solicitor General comes from. I've been to his community and I like the waterfront especially, some of the old stone buildings there. But there's one fellow who looks like he — he's trying to trash Runciman; he really is, a fellow called McKenna. No wonder he lost the election, if that's as good as he can come up with in terms of vitriol. I'll wait till after, but if that's the level of energy McKenna used in attacking Runciman during the last provincial election, so much for the Liberal candidate's prospects out in Brockville. Heck, I could have said nastier things about the Solicitor General without even having known him. But here you've got a fellow, McKenna, who is still fighting the election.

Again, I suppose every time a new government gets elected, one hopes that things can be done differently. This government has demonstrated very quickly that it isn't intent on moving forward, but is prepared to turn the hands of time back to what it sees as the good old days of maybe the 1940s or 1950s, and you know what I mean, when only the rich got to university, when only the rich got health care, when women knew their place. The government sees those as the good old days, the 1940s and 1950s, when the sick could get medical treatment only if they had money.

I was hoping, I suppose, however naïvely — and I can see that with this government it would be naïve to hope — that maybe finally there would be a government that would embark on some true tripartite, if you will, committee activities where they didn't weight up the committee like they have, committee after committee. They did it on Bill 102 — mind you, at the end of the day not with some of the same incredibly serious consequences that have attached to so many other pieces of legislation for the general public and general good.

We, and quite frankly OPSEU did too, Leah Casselman and correctional officers here in Ontario, had offered from day one to work with this government, any government, to talk about corrections and to do it in a very public way and perhaps to bring in some expertise and talk about places where changes can and should be made. The real issue is, one, hoping that as few people as possible have to be sent to jail. The second one, and the Solicitor General knows this and has articulated it himself, is hoping you reduce the recidivism rate; in other words, hoping that jail

has had a meaningful impact, should an offender commit a serious enough crime to warrant going there. I would have welcomed and this party would have welcomed and would have participated in a very non-partisan way in a very public and candid discussion about corrections in the province of Ontario: where changes had to be made, if any, and how.

The government doesn't do things that way. Oh, it sent its three musketeers on a little trip to New York City to examine — please. We've got to go to New York City to get lessons on policing? It really boggles the mind a little bit. Or, quite frankly, lessons on crime control: That was a weird one. I have my own views about that and the wherefore and the why of that little junket. I'll not share them here. I may never share them with the public, because — just because.

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The other issue, though, is that this government actually exploits the mythology of increasing crime when in fact they're forced to agree that crime rates have dropped, albeit by small percentages, by small numbers. Why won't they have an open and honest discussion about crime and the causes of crime and maybe some innovative or creative ways of reducing the rate of crime before the fact, not after the fact, not with mega-jails where offenders are warehoused and where they become yet more skilled criminals upon their release, but examining the whole issue of real rehabilitation or conducting the type of exercise Barbara Hall and Marilyn Churley, both as councillors for Toronto city council, did — it must have been a heck of a long time ago, but when they were both city councillors — when they did community audits, taking a look at what helps to make safer communities? To me, those seem like much sounder investments.

One wonders what role the Solicitor General took in cabinet on the issue of the abandonment of junior kindergarten, because we know there is all sorts of strong data — the data's there; argue with it if you want — talking about youngsters that had JK and how they were more inclined to complete their high school years. Come on, Solicitor General. Youngsters who are more inclined to complete high school, to go to high school even, are less inclined to find themselves in conflict with the criminal justice system, less inclined to find themselves involved in some of the rather serious crimes that I acknowledge young people are involved in. You've got to be from Mars not to know that's happening.

But there's nothing about this government's approach that can give any of us any assurance that the rate of crime is going to be reduced. Will it get tougher with offenders? It may well; I don't know. Will that have an effect on recidivism? I think not, because the American experience says very specifically that merely getting tough doesn't address the issue. When we've got escalating youth unemployment that continues, in a whole lot of this province, to be well into the double-digit figures; when we've got young people for whom the door is being slammed because of the tuition rate increases by this government, this government's desire that only the kids of rich families go to university and college; when we've got a government that won't look at crime and criminality and talk about ways of addressing it I suppose at the community level; when we've got families under attack because we've got a government here that doesn't care enough about kids and their moms to have an Attorney General with sufficient competence to get an FSP up and running or, even more so, to implement his 10 tough tools for enforcement of family support plan orders, I think you've got a government that's merely talking a big game, putting as much spin as it can and wanting to talk tough, but delivering zero.

We're going to support Bill 102, because in its own small way it will catch the occasional person. We've heard examples cited about people who are dropping through the cracks, and we're going to stop that. But Bill 102 does not address the reality of crime; it doesn't address the reality of victims of crime. Bill 102, while it may play well to the law-and-order theme, is but a scratch on the surface. I think this government had better be prepared to start talking honestly and —

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The member's time has expired. Questions and comments?

Mr Galt: That was certainly entertaining. I listened very carefully to the member for Welland-Thorold speaking on, I thought, Bill 102, but it was rarely that he was on topic in making reference to it. I followed his talk quite a bit, about surprise announcements on Bill 136 and where some of the Conservatives were at that time. He then talked about Brockville and the Liberal candidate that Mr Runciman was running against. I don't care whether it was a good Liberal or a poor Liberal; Mr Runciman is going to win hands down every time. And then he talked about the good old days. The good old days you were describing didn't sound so good; they sounded like kind of nasty old days, the way you were putting it forward. You talked about trips to New York City. You talked about JK quite a bit; that had nothing to do with Bill 102. But you did lead that into serious crime, and I thought that was kind of close to being on topic. Then you talked about kids from rich families. Then you even wound up with the family support plan.

You notice how much I was following your speech. It had nothing to do with Bill 102 except on rare occasions. It's interesting that in Bill 102, when dangerous offenders are being released, it's very important that notification is being made to the community. I don't think our friend from Welland-Thorold ever even touched on that part, the disclosure of information, and I think this is pretty important, that police services boards can develop policies, come up with regulations as to the nature of information that will be disclosed and to whom that information will be disclosed and under what circumstances.

I think it is high time we had that in place. It has been far too long that various criminals — maybe we think or they think their time has been fairly served. However, I think it is only reasonable that people in the community know when they return to the community so they can at least be forewarned.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I want to compliment the member for Welland-Thorold for his, as always, diverse remarks, a member who, no one can dispute, cares very much about what goes on in the Legislature and about a lot of the issues and manages to get them into any speech.

I want to let the members know that I support Bill 102 as well, as does our caucus. This is a good first step. There are some concerns about the actual execution of this bill in terms of the registrar general and the Solicitor General sharing information. I think the system is not yet set up in terms of the name change realities, and we have some concerns based on previous experience with programs that the government has tried to set up and hasn't put in place. But we are supportive of this bill.

I also want to use this opportunity to make reference to a letter relating to this issue that was recently sent by the Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council to the Solicitor General. The women's decade council is a non-partisan, volunteer-based organization composed of members of district women's groups in our area who are very concerned about a number of issues and present priorities, including violence against women and women's economic issues.

They wrote that they're very concerned about many of the aspects of the victims' crisis assistance and referral services, including issues around training, confidentiality and accountability. A general concern they expressed related to the generic design of the program to be applied to all victims of crime. Specific concerns included, among others, the use of volunteers in the area of physical and sexual assault cases. Many of these situations, they point out, are extremely dangerous and potentially life-threatening to the victims and the individuals intervening at the time of the incidents and they continue to remain dangerous for lengthy periods of time. The use of volunteers for this perilous front-line work concerns them, and I wanted to express concern on behalf of the decade council and hope the minister will be replying to them in the near future.

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Mr Martin: I want to congratulate the member for Welland-Thorold for a very thoughtful and reasoned presentation here this evening. It's not his typical presentation; usually he's very impassioned and speaks with some authority and you can feel the force of his argument in the way he presents. Tonight it was a different approach, but it speaks to the depth he brings to issues of this nature in this House.

I just want to comment on a couple of things. I think we need to focus sometimes on the people making the presentations. The member for Welland-Thorold is not known as a politician who falls in line lock, stock and barrel behind any ideology or leadership group. I think he showed that when he was a member of the government I was part of from 1990 to 1995. So I would suggest that people listen to what he has to say because there's an air of authority and integrity that comes with his very person.

The other point I want to comment on is the point he made about this piece of legislation not going, in any significant way, to reduce the amount of crime that's out there in our communities. This piece of legislation, even though it has some things we can support and folks around the House will support, is in fact another wallpapering of a larger agenda this government is imposing on the people of Ontario that is at the end of the day going to cause us more problems than it solves.

For example, when you push people into poverty in the way this government is pushing people into poverty, as a result you get a rise in the level of crime as people try to find the means to sustain themselves. In the September 8 copy of the Catholic Register, a newspaper some of you across the way will read because I know you've written letters to the editor, it says, "Welfare reform ghettoizes the poor." That creates more violence.

Mr Jack Carroll (Chatham-Kent): It's always a pleasure to comment on a speech made by the member for Welland-Thorold, former key cabinet member in the Bob Rae government, who regales us with his insights. He didn't say much about Bill 102 other than that he and his caucus endorse it completely, so I can't comment on his comments on Bill 102.

However, I would like to set the record straight on a couple of other things he did say. He made a comment that this government exploits the mythology of increasing crime. To the OPP officer in Chatham who was recently beaten up by two thugs on his way home from work there's no mythology about the increase in crime. The women and children who are victimized brutally by crime don't like to hear us speak about the mythology of increasing crime. I think that was a poor choice of words on his part.

He also went on and said that our government has no qualms about abolishing junior kindergarten. What an absurd comment to make. We have not abolished junior kindergarten. All we have done, and he knows full well what we have done, is that we have said that junior kindergarten will be funded exactly the same way as any other grade. I don't believe that is abolishing junior kindergarten.

He also said this government was only interested in the kids of rich families going to university and college, another totally absurd comment. I'm sure he knows full well that in 1997-98, $1.7 billion will be paid out in student loans to students in Ontario, about the same as was paid out in 1996-97. That's $1.7 billion. Student loans are not given to children of rich families

I just wanted to make sure the member for Welland-Thorold had the record straightened out on those issues.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The member for Welland-Thorold.

Mr Kormos: I'm pleased, and I suspect the Tory caucus should be pleased, that the member for Northumberland is a veterinarian, because when I hear this porcine squealing going on over there, they may well need his services. It could be a matter not of, "Is there a doctor in the House," but, "Is there a veterinarian in the House?"

The member for Northumberland is over there ready to accommodate.

Let's talk about these attempts to distract attention. I understand that my speaking style isn't one that endears me to the Tories. The minute it does, I'm going to readjust my speaking style. The fact is that I'm here to say to them things that people in Welland-Thorold and Niagara, and quite frankly in a whole lot of other parts of the province, would like to be able to say to them if they were blessed with the opportunity I have. I am telling you the things I have been able to say to them tonight about Bill 102 are the sorts of things a whole lot of folks out there would want to say, and that is that it's fine to talk a big game about law and order, but you've got to deliver.

All the talk in the world about law and order, all the Bill 102s — relax, we're supporting it — mean diddly squat when you call the cops at 2 in the morning and the dispatcher says, "We'll try to have somebody there in an hour or an hour and a half because we're so short-staffed tonight that we've got one or two police officers out dealing with a serious traffic accident where there's been bodily injury and there's only one other police officer left," and he or she is way the heck over on the other side of the region and is expecting a call now. All the law and order —

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Maybe we should declare a week. Let's declare a week.

Mr Kormos: Yes, you can have all the police weeks you want; it ain't going to solve the problem of this government's attack on communities, its defunding of policing and imperilling police officers and citizenry in the process.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Grimmett: In the time remaining I'd like to make a few brief comments on Bill 102, and I think perhaps I'll be able to stay on topic. Maybe the people at home who have been watching this evening will see that, like the member for Timiskaming, I have read the bill and I will keep my comments to Bill 102. It's too bad the member for Timiskaming isn't here because the story I want to tell on Bill 102 has to do with the time I spent in Timiskaming riding. That's where I started my legal career as an articling student and it actually ties in with Bill 102.

What is surprising is that back in 1981, when I was in Kirkland Lake, I had a case as an articling law student on the Change of Name Act. I went before a judge. In those days you had to prepare an affidavit on behalf of the applicant and go before a judge and you had to give the reasons in the affidavit for why you needed your name changed. The client I had at that time was a nice young lady who had a reason — I can't even remember why she needed her name changed. In those days, the Change of Name Act was about a one-page act.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): Because she became your wife?

Mr Grimmett: No, she didn't become my wife. But the affidavit I put in indicated she had a criminal record. When I went before the judge — and if the member for Timiskaming were here he would know Judge Bernstein because I believe he's still a sitting judge in Haileybury — he said: "Counsel, your client has a criminal record. Does the Solicitor General's office approve of this application for a change of name?"

Being the bold young counsel I was and having read the act, I said: "Your Honour, that's not covered in the act. It's not necessary for me to answer the question."

Well, I got about a 10-minute tirade from Judge Bernstein, who insisted that I go down the hall. He held court up while I went down the hall. The Haileybury courthouse is a huge courthouse that had about one room that was actually being used, kind of like this building at times.

So I went down to the library, got the Change of Name Act, brought it back, read the entire act to the judge, and of course he couldn't believe the act did not require that a person with a criminal record would have to get the change of name approved by some government authority. He took it upon himself, over my objections, to require that I contact the Solicitor General's office, find out if they had any objection to the application for a change of name, and that I submit an affidavit in my own name indicating they had no objection. As it turned out, I contacted someone in the ministry and they did some kind of check on the person. It was a very minor offence, I think it was shoplifting, that the person had committed —

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): From a Canadian Tire store?

Mr Grimmett: Who knows? Maybe with a shoplifting record there were victims out there who objected to the application. In any event, I returned to the courtroom a week or two later with my client in tow, produced the affidavit, and the judge, who I think had done the proper thing even though it was not covered in the act, indicated he felt more secure granting the order and giving the change of name.

I wonder how many times that has occurred in courtrooms in other jurisdictions in Ontario, where a judge has believed it's necessary for the public to have some comment on a person changing their name when they have a criminal record.

I want in particular to support the bill and to congratulate the Solicitor General and the other two parties, which are supporting the bill, for this step which is long overdue and which from my own experience is one the public will definitely support and is very necessary to ensure continued public safety. I think it will lead to greater public safety for those communities we all care about.

It being in the vicinity of 9:30, Madam Speaker, that's where I'll end my remarks.

The Acting Speaker: It being almost 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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Wednesday 24 September 1997

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Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Chris Stockwell

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 24 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 24 septembre 1997

The House met at 1332.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CLASS SIZE

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): John Snobelen's new education legislation will not achieve what parents, students and teachers want and expect from this government. Rather than enhancing our system, all partners in education now agree that this bill and the minister's tactics will only lead to an inferior quality of education with inferior results for students.

Look at what has happened so far because of the cuts to education: 28 school boards have made cuts to special education; 25 have cancelled junior kindergarten; nine, library services; 50 have made cuts to transportation services; and 49 have cut elementary and secondary school staff. This has caused class sizes to grow to critical levels, and no, this legislation will neither protect nor reduce class sizes.

The minister and this document only pay lip-service to limiting class sizes. It doesn't give details and it doesn't give numbers. If the government were truly committed to protecting class sizes, it would call my bill, Bill 110, which not only protects class sizes but protects and enshrines a pupil's right to learn in a meaningful way in an appropriate class size.

There's no question about it: The government spin, the advertising, the PR gurus all have the right fluff, but the people of Ontario know that Shakespeare was right when he said, "All that glitters is not gold."

NORTH BAY DAYS OF ACTION

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): This is day 3 of the North Bay Days of Action and the activity mounts. There are rallies being held, there are educational seminars; people are getting together and expressing their outrage at the actions of the Harris government.

There are a lot of letters of support coming to the organizers as well; for example, a letter to Lana Mitchell and Dawson Pratt, who are co-chairs of the North Bay Days of Action, from the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. They indicate that many child care workers from the north will be coming to North Bay on the weekend and "demonstrating that there is real opposition to the Tory program. The child care community will be there," they say in their own words, "because we are alarmed at the government moves to direct public funding to programs that don't provide for high-quality child care services/programs such as tax credits and deductions or vouchers for unlicensed/unregulated care. Implementing workfare will place children, already at risk due to poverty, in double jeopardy thanks to care provisions without even minimal health and safety standards."

While there will be many expressions of protest, there will also be some celebration: child care workers who will be celebrating the court decision that says the Harris government's attack on pay equity was unconstitutional; and of course the stunning retreat on Bill 136. As Dawson Pratt, one of the co-chairs, says, "Fighting back works."

"Our slogan is 'Organize, Educate, Resist.' Our goal is 'Take Back Ontario.' Ordinary people can achieve change when they stick together."

JULIE BROOKS

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): What do a collection of tents from the local Canadian Tire store and a love of the outdoors have in common? If you are a 20-year-old Sunderland woman, it resulted in her receiving the prestigious Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. His Royal Highness Prince Philip presented Julie Brooks, who had already received the bronze and silver awards, with the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award, Young Canadians Challenge, at a recent ceremony in Toronto.

Julie won the award for planning a five-day outdoor excursion which saw three canoes of participants paddling and portaging through five lakes in the Minden area. She had to acquire the food, ready the equipment, map out the route and lead the expedition.

Community service requirements are also prerequisite to qualifying for the award. Julie served as the 1994 Sunderland Ambassador of the Fair, taught Sunday school at St Andrew's United Church in Sunderland and performed with the school band.

Julie grew up in Sunderland, where she attended Sunderland public school and graduated from Brock high school in Cannington.

I congratulate Julie for her award-winning accomplishments and I wish her success as she attends her second year at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, where she is studying outdoor education.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Sound the bugles of retreat. The Conservative government of Mike Harris appears to be in complete disarray these days as it lurches from crisis to crisis, seemingly rudderless and having lost its nerve.

Instead of producing a compliant, acquiescent population with its bullying, intimidating tactics, the Harris regime has annoyed, antagonized and angered the people of Ontario. The very rich and the privileged may cheer on their man Mike, but the people on Main Street are beginning to see through the Nonsense Revolution, which seeks to confront and divide and to destroy the institutions and programs built with the sweat and struggle of so many in our province.

The Premier can huff and puff and bluster at what he calls the enemy of the people, but when his Conservative Party hits the skids in the polls, mighty Mike will run for cover and take John Snobelen and Elizabeth Witmer with him.

Those the Harris crowd sought to intimidate stood up to the bully and the bully has blinked. Panic has set into the nonsense revolutionaries as policies change weekly, daily or even hourly.

But the gentler, kinder, more accommodating image that Mike's public relations handlers are trying to portray will fool no one. It infuriates the angry, extremist right wing of the Conservative caucus and wins no converts among those who have seen the real Harris revolutionaries in action.

Listen for the beeping sound and get out of the way if you're behind the Harris truck. It's backing up in full retreat.

CANCER PREVENTION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): The Women's Network on Health and Environment is holding a public preview of the film Exposure: Environmental Links to Breast Cancer, to be held at 8 pm on Thursday, September 25, in the medical sciences auditorium at the University of Toronto. The preview will be followed by discussion. I urge all of those who are interested in prevention and treatment of breast cancer to go see that film because it makes the connections between environmental carcinogens and cancer.

I say to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Environment, it is now nearly 18 months since all parties in this Legislature voted to establish a committee to consider the banning or phasing out of carcinogenic substances as a step towards the primary prevention of cancer. I made that resolution, it was passed by this House and there's been absolutely no response from the Minister of Health and the Minister of Environment except to pass the buck. After two years in office and no action, cancer patients and their families have no confidence that either of you even understands what primary prevention of cancer is all about.

You have established Cancer Care Ontario, but we need to know that direction for prevention is set there and that you will refer the Report on the Primary Prevention of Cancer to the board of Cancer Care Ontario for consideration and action. I urge both ministers to take that into account.

1340

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Allan K. McLean (Simcoe East): Last Thursday, the Leader of the Opposition stood to question the Minister of Education. The leader used a constituent of mine as an example of a student suffering because of ministry cuts. The member knew his example was a local board of education decision. It was not connected to any policy or direction from the Ministry of Education.

It is from sheer frustration with local school staff and the board that these parents contacted the Leader of the Opposition. The parents, who live a few houses from the Wyevale school, have a real issue. Their concerns should have been resolved at the local level.

Under the amendments to the Education Act, parents will have greater say in their children's education and school policies. Bill 160, if passed, will give parents an opportunity to be more involved in the direction of education in their district. With the implementation of these changes, incidents such as this will not happen again.

I have spoken to the people at Wyevale. I understand their anger at the decision that the staff at the board of education have made. The Wyevale school board trustee is quoted as saying, "She was not privy to the decision, since it was an administrative decision, and the board of trustees was not consulted." It is the elected officials who are responsible to their constituents, not staff.

It is not cuts to education that are causing the problem; it is local decisions being made without consultation to those affected or those elected.

Tonight's meeting with the Simcoe County Board of Education I hope will resolve this matter, and the pupils will be in their proper school.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): The Minister of Education is making up students' educational futures as he goes along. Wasn't it just yesterday that the minister was describing his new school year as one of the hallmarks of his educational reform? Today he is saying there won't be an extended year after all. How fast can this minister change his mind and how can anybody know what is coming next?

Parents have some very real concerns about what the Harris government has already done to education — they are truly worried about what this Minister of Education wants to do — and the only thing they know for sure is that the needs of their kids are not what is driving the agenda.

Parents have 10 top questions for John Snobelen that they want answered:

(10) Will you guarantee that capping class sizes will not mean losses elsewhere?

(9) Will all the boards in Ontario have junior kindergarten in September 1998?

(8) Are libraries, music programs, gym and special education part of the classroom as you define it?

(7) How much tax is business going to pay for education, and will their taxes be pooled?

(6) What are the specific powers and duties of school councils?

(5) How are you going to make it a law that schools have to have school councils, and what will you do to schools that can't manage it?

(4) Which positions are you going to designate as non-teaching positions?

(3) If education taxes stay in the community in which they're raised, how do you plan to guarantee equality?

(2) Can you guarantee that in cities such as Toronto and Ottawa there will not be massive cuts to public boards in order to make up for inequities between public and separate school funding?

(1) Question number one from parents: Can you guarantee that we will see a specific and detailed funding model by November 1?

Most of all they want the Minister of Education —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): Let me say to the Minister of Environment and Energy that, contrary to his hope that things would die off in terms of further requests for a public inquiry into Plastimet, things continue to grow and pressure mounts.

On Saturday, the Hamilton Spectator said, in part:

"...this newspaper has called four times for an investigation. Today's instalment makes it five.... When it comes to the fire, the response to the fire, events leading up to and possibly contributing to the fire and the legacy of the fire, the Harris government's policy is clear: Deny, deny, deny. Given that, we can't promise you an end to Plastimet editorials. Something is really wrong here, and we just can't get past that."

Further: "Were the right measures taken at the right times in an effort to get Plastimet owners to correct fire code violations? If appropriate measures were taken, are fire code enforcement measures impotent? Does Ontario need new fire code regulations that would allow authorities to force quick compliance on people like the Plastimet owners? Did local police respond with the appropriate crowd control measures when the fire broke out? Did the local fire department respond appropriately with the right materials and strategy for dealing with this fire? Did the Ministry of the Environment respond appropriately? Should area residents have been evacuated sooner than they were?"

Yesterday the regional chairman and mayor of the city sent out a joint news release calling for a public inquiry to be held in the interest of our community and others. The regional municipality of Niagara has said they want one in the interest of their municipality and ours. We need a public inquiry into Plastimet.

SENIORS SEMINAR

Mr Tom Froese (St Catharines-Brock): I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in a seniors seminar I sponsored on Friday afternoon, September 19, 1997, in the city of St Catharines. The seminar, partnered with Tabor Manor Mennonite Homes residents and staff, such as Rudy Siemens and Pam Pauls, was covered by Cogeco community television and attended by seniors from across the Niagara region.

The seniors heard about the benefits of the Ontario drug benefit plan with Gary Michaluk of the Ministry of Health; how to avoid scam artists, with Niagara Regional Police Detective Bob Glen; and the key components of the Ministry of Transportation seniors driver licensing program, with Steve Kivell of that ministry.

Without a doubt, this government is committed to seniors and safety, and certainly avenues for public awareness are important. In fact Detective Glen said that there had been fewer scams reported since he spoke at my last seminar on April 4, 1997, which was also televised. Certainly, seniors seminars are one way to promote that kind of awareness. Again, my thanks to all those involved.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I beg leave to inform the House that today the Clerk received the 45th report of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 105(g)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by this House.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Yesterday the member for St Catharines (Mr Bradley) raised a point of privilege with respect to a Ministry of Education advertising campaign. The government House leader (Mr Johnson) and the third party House leader also made submissions with respect to this matter. The member for St Catharines argued that the ad campaign conveyed the impression that the passage of the Education Quality Improvement Act is a foregone conclusion.

I have reviewed the ad in question, and I must say that I cannot find within it any evidence that the phrase, "is implementing a plan," relates to any specific proceeding of this House. In fact the reference to a plan, in my view, leaves the impression that there are a number of components involved, some of which may certainly be legislation but not necessarily one particular bill.

My point is this: If the education bill introduced Monday does not pass, the government may still have in its plan to reduce class size by some other means. The terminology used in the ad does not rely upon any particular piece of legislation to project its message; indeed, it would still make sense to a listener even in the absence of the education bill.

In short, the more generic nature of this ad leads me to the conclusion that a prima facie case of privilege has not been made out.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Well, the member for Ottawa-Rideau, I may throw someone out today. I've been promising for a while, and I may fulfil that promise, member for Ottawa-Rideau.

1350

ORAL QUESTIONS

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Health. I understand he's just now making his way into the House.

Yesterday in this Legislature I raised the question with you of three Ottawa hospitals that were going to be closed two years before the necessary renovations were completed at a fourth Ottawa hospital, and that 23,000 patients would be left in the lurch as a result. You said something that came as tremendous news to us in the province of Ontario. You said "that if the physical space isn't available, then nobody will move anywhere." What you did was you told us that there is some flexibility attached to the dates on which hospitals are supposed to be closed. I just wanted to confirm that for those three hospitals in Ottawa, and for that matter for hospitals everywhere in the province that have been set to close as a result of the work of your commission, there is now some flexibility attached to those dates of closure.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): Until the commission says otherwise, they are their dates, they are their directions. They are bound in law. All of us are bound to those dates. There will be no change in the dates.

What I said in response to a hypothetical question yesterday, a ridiculous hypothetical question which was meant to scaremonger the people of Ottawa and the people of Ontario, that somehow all the common sense from all the administrators, doctors and nurses would be thrown out of the system, and that 24,000 people who rely on emergency rooms today would somehow be out on the street because the six new emergency rooms, in addition to the ones they have today, the more capacity for patients that's envisioned for Ottawa by the Health Services Restructuring Commission, that if that wasn't ready that people would be thrown out in the streets — it's a ridiculous question, it's hypothetical and I'm surprised he's pursuing it again today.

Mr McGuinty: Yesterday you told us there was some flexibility attached to the dates on which hospitals are supposed to close. Do you know what happened yesterday? We should all understand this. Yesterday the minister slipped and for one moment he assumed some responsibility as the minister responsible for the health of patients in Ontario. Imagine that. It was a momentary lapse. He's proved that to us today. Perhaps he's fully recovered and is now assuming his role that he has assumed under the Harris government.

Wellesley is slated to close in March 1999. Is that date also flexible, Minister? Because that's what you said yesterday. You said that if the space wasn't there, if the supports weren't in place, then that date could be changed. Northwestern is slated to close very soon, November 3 of this year. There is a very real concern there as well about accommodation and supports. Is that date also flexible? Is there flexibility, yes or no?

Hon Mr Wilson: Under the law, the flexibility can only be exercised by the Health Services Restructuring Commission. I suggest the honourable member ask the commission that question.

Mr McGuinty: You can't have it both ways, and that's not in keeping with the story you delivered to us in this House yesterday. Yesterday you said — I was taken aback because you were so reasonable — that if the need should arise, if it's in the interests of Ontario patients, if the supports aren't there, if the renovations haven't been completed, then, "Yes, I will act to ensure that the hospitals don't close." That's what you said. I didn't say that.

What you said yesterday, Minister — you should understand this — was a good thing. I want to support you in that. What I want you to do now is to stand up and confirm that what you said yesterday is what you again believe in today, that there is some flexibility attached to hospital closure dates and we will do whatever is necessary to protect health care in Ontario.

Hon Mr Wilson: Yes, I've learned one thing in the last 24 hours, and the old adage that politicians shouldn't answer hypothetical ridiculous questions is something I shouldn't have done. The honourable member said, "If," — and there was a big "if" — "X, Y and Z happen." He's correct in his quote back to me, and we all have the Hansard. I said I'm sure the commission would exercise flexibility if there's no place for those patients to go.

What I want to know from the honourable member is, are you in favour of restructuring or not? That's what I want to know; that's what the voters of Ontario want to know. You're sitting on the fence. Yes, your cousins in Ottawa, the Liberals, cut us $2 billion. You've gotten away with absolute — you should be disgraced on that one, but no, no, the voters decided to put the Liberals back in office in Ottawa. That's fine. We're coping with that. We're restructuring the system. We're making the system better for patients.

I don't know where you are in this equation, Mr McGuinty, and I won't give up till I find out where your party stands on hospital restructuring in this province.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My second question is for the Minister of Education and Training. I want to return to the case of Gordie Kirwan, because I believe that case to be very instructive in telling us something about you, where you're coming from and whether or not you have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of our students in Ontario.

You will recall that several months ago now I brought to this House the case of Gordie Kirwan, a young man who is 22 years of age, handsome, strapping, in perfect health but for the fact that he has the mind of a three-year-old. Gordie doesn't play with a football; he plays with his teddy bear.

His parents have delivered the message to you and I have as well. You promised that you would change the law in Ontario so that Gordie could continue his education, because as it stands right now, his parents are paying over $1,000 a month to allow their son to continue with his education.

Why should parents and students across the province believe you've got students' interests at heart if you're not even going to look after Gordie Kirwan?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I believe I answered this question for the Leader of the Opposition last week. I told the Leader of the Opposition that we had agreed, I have agreed, to compensate Gordie Kirwan's family for the costs of the program this year. We have done that. We've lived up to our obligation.

But the larger question is, and I pointed this out to the Leader of the Opposition, can we learn something from this case that will help other people, other young adults in the same circumstance across Ontario? I think the answer to that question is yes. We're working now in developing a policy that will help all the young people who are in that circumstance right across the province.

Mr McGuinty: I want to take issue once again with the minister when he says he has paid the tuition fees, because he has not. The other day in this House I produced the receipt issued to Gordie's mother showing she had paid over $1,000 for tuition fees for the month of September. She paid that, that's her hard-earned money and you should stop saying that you paid it.

We're not just talking about Gordie here; we're talking about the thousands of Gordies right across the province. Members should understand that it was over two years ago that Gordie's dad came across an unknown guy by the name of Mike Harris, then leader of the third party. He bought him a cup of coffee and he explained to him the problems they were having in getting education for their son. Mike Harris, then leader of the third party, said, "Don't worry, because if I become Premier I will fix this."

You've been in power over two years. They're still paying for the tuition fees. You've broken your promise to Gordie's parents, you've broken your promise to Gordie and you've broken the promise to thousands of others right across the province who are like Gordie. Minister, you tell us you're going to fix it. When are you going to do it?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The Leader of the Opposition, I believe, heard my reply just a few moments ago when I said that the ministry had agreed to, I had agreed to, compensate Gordie's parents for the cost of tuition, and we have done that. I pointed that out to the Leader of the Opposition last week.

I think the Leader of the Opposition in his question recognizes the fact that for some time governments, Liberal governments, NDP governments, have been petitioned to take care of adults over 21 who have some chance of education, using education services, and are precluded by the Education Act. We are taking that on. We're working very hard with my colleagues to get a policy and a program that will work. This is not a simple matter. Obviously, there are issues of integration versus segregation. There are different opinions on how this should be handled within the community. We are working to find a solution to this.

But let me say again to the Leader of the Opposition that we have made payment to the Kirwans and lived up to our obligation to them.

1400

Mr McGuinty: I think this small snippet of the problems faced by one particular family, in terms of trying to have their son educated, is most instructive in terms of the approach this government brings to people in need generally. Gordie Kirwan may never pay taxes, he will likely never vote, and you have failed to live up to your responsibility to him.

The Premier made a promise over two years ago that if he became Premier he would fix this, he would make a change in the law. You personally have met with the Kirwans; you personally phoned Mrs Kirwan and said you would fix it. You said you would ensure that she wouldn't have to pay any money starting in September of this year. She's paid money; they've cashed her cheque. You told me that you sent her a cheque to reimburse her. I can tell you that as of today she has not received it. What I want to ask you once again is, when are you going to do something for Gordie and the thousands of others just like him right across this province?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let me once again, for probably the fifth time in the last week, make this very clear to the Leader of the Opposition: Gordie is in school. We have agreed to compensate Gordie's family for the cost of being in school and we have issued payment. That is the status of this file.

If this reveals anything, it's that the Leader of the Opposition is willing to play politics with this kind of issue, just like he played politics yesterday by trying to inflame people across the province, by trying to inflame teachers across the province, by inferring that a section of the bill that we put forward in this House would somehow ban strikes when he should know as a lawyer that it will not, when he should have got the legal opinion that it will not. He was clearly off base yesterday; he's clearly off base today. He should get his facts straight.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The opposition gallery has in it Mr Ross McClellan, a previous member for Bellwoods. Welcome.

HOME CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Health. You've cut $23 million from the operating budgets of hospitals in Hamilton. That's a figure that you and your officials have announced, and that takes into account a $7-million reinvestment that you announced. The $23-million cut means that Hamilton hospitals are being forced to discharge patients earlier than ever. In fact, they're being forced to discharge patients when those patients are still in need of care.

Some of that care will be provided by the homemakers program. But people in Hamilton are getting a letter — and have gotten a letter — from the Visiting Homemakers Association saying to them that the homemakers association has no more budget to provide them with needed homemaking services, that in fact homemaking services are being cut, they're simply not going to be available. How can you tell people on the one hand, while you're cutting hospital budgets, that they're going to get care in the community and care in their homes when they get a letter from the homemakers services saying there's no more care available?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I'd appreciate if the honourable member would give me a copy of that letter. It's certainly contradictory to anything I've heard from Hamilton. I will personally check the association. We were there just a few weeks ago to announce millions of dollars for home care in Hamilton.

Secondly, I will say that it is not the responsibility of the Minister of Health, it is the responsibility of the hospitals, to make sure a plan is in place before they discharge people. It's not legal for them to discharge people without a care plan in place. If you have individual cases, I suggest you take those to the hospitals. They have a fiduciary responsibility to look after those patients.

More money is going into home care in Hamilton, so I'd be quite curious to find out what that letter says.

Mr Hampton: I'll quote to the minister from this letter:

"As many of you have already experienced, the hours provided to clients are being reduced, yet the number of short visits is increasing and the complexity of client care is greater....

"We know that the reduction in hours is being felt by clients.... Some clients are purchasing homemaking services to make up the difference in the hours dropped from public funding."

That's what the letter says, Minister. It says that homemakers can't provide the services that are needed and people who can't get the services any longer have to go out and buy them privately. This is called two-tier health care. You get a little bit from the public but then you have to spend more out of your own pocket. It's a lot like American health care: You purchase the services privately.

Minister, isn't that what's really happening? You cut the hospitals, you also limit the homemakers and people are put in the position where they have to spend money out of their own pocket to get private homemaker services. That's what's really happening, isn't it?

Hon Mr Wilson: The Hamilton-Wentworth home care budget has gone up from $23.5 million to $43.9 million, an 86.4% increase. They have more than their fair share of home care in the province. It's one of the highest per capita areas in the province. I will be personally looking into that letter from the home care association. It sounds like a bit of politics to me.

Yes, the community care access centre is reporting an expected deficit of $1.1 million. That isn't unusual. That's part of the ongoing process. We project at the beginning of the year. The local community tells us what their demand is, we give them the funding, and of course the funding's up dramatically over the last little while. My note indicates that staff are working every day with the people in Hamilton to address the demands. Their community care access centre is one of I think two in the province that isn't up and running, and Mr Jackson's trying to get that going. We've had some problems there.

It's not true that there's less money; there's clearly more money in Hamilton.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): Minister, in the past it is quite true that you have covered deficits at the end, but let me quote from this letter again. The Visiting Homemakers Association "and all other service provider agencies, have recently received the disturbing news that the home care program must stay within its allocated budget from now on. In previous years, the Ministry of Health has provided additional funding to cover any deficit incurred during the year by the home care program. It will no longer do this."

The real issue here is you don't have a clue what's going on. You cut money from the hospitals, they have to put people out into the community earlier, the demand is increasing. Even your restructuring commission has made it very clear from its documents that they don't know what the demand is going to be as this keeps on going with people coming home earlier from hospitals as a result of the cuts. You simply don't know what the demand is going to be and yet you have told homemaking services that they're not going to be able to build the deficits that they have been able to do in the past to ensure that people get cared for. This is not the hospitals' problem, Minister. This is your problem. When are you going to resolve it?

Hon Mr Wilson: I'll refer the last question to the Honourable Cam Jackson.

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): I want to acknowledge the member's supplementary question because she comes from a com-

munity, in London, where she has seen the successful model, as brought forward by this government, fully implemented to streamline the process, to bring in the accountability systems that were missing in home care in this province. This government brought that in two years ago, proper assessment criteria for patients.

The problem with the opposition members, especially the former government, is that they had five years to stabilize this environment and create stable criteria. This government believes that a person in London should get the same level of care as a person in Hamilton, Windsor or Ottawa. This government has brought in those criteria so that fairness and additional funding — I remind the member there's 170 million new dollars going into long-term care and community-based supports in this province and Hamilton is getting its fair share.

1410

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): My next question is for the Minister of Education. I wonder if the Minister of Education can explain the confusing state that he has created.

A week ago he announced that children would be going back to school a week early. Not only did he announce it, but it was part of his propaganda piece. It was a story he spun on to The National, the CBC news, that night. Then we find out this week, in fact this morning, that students aren't going to be going back to school a week early after all. We're told that someone in the Ministry of Education did some arithmetic and figured out that if they sent students back to school a week early, it would cost some more money, and that would interfere with the $1 billion the government wants to take out of education. If you send kids back to school a week early, you can't get the full $1 billion.

I want to ask the minister this simple question, will students be going back to school a week early in 1998 or not?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): First, the leader of the third party has it wrong. We did receive a report a week and a half ago that made the recommendation that students go back to school the week before Labour Day. We received that recommendation along with others. I said then, and said today, that we support the thinking behind those recommendations. We did not adopt them all at that time, nor did we adopt that one.

I said today very quickly, because there are some concerns with parents — particularly rural members have brought it to my attention, in the rural parts of Ontario — that an earlier start to school would be a problem, so we moved today to say we will work with the school communities, we will work with our colleagues in the House of all political parties, to find a way to get the in-school time of students up to the level recommended by the EIC without having to expand the students' school year.

We will accept the recommendation of the EIC regarding teachers going back to school a week before the students, because we believe it's important to have them be ready for the students when they arrive at the beginning of the school year. That's what we announced today. It's in response to the requests we have heard from people from —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Supplementary.

Mr Hampton: The Minister of Education gets more confusing as days go on. Go into a school. Teachers are already in their schools before Labour Day. Everybody knows that. Your announcement was very specific: Students were going to be in the schools before Labour Day. You were going to add a week before Labour Day to the school year, but now you've done the arithmetic and you find out it doesn't work.

I want to ask you about your $1-million dollar propaganda campaign, because that seems to be a waste too. You're out spending $1 million on propaganda. I have been in touch with a number of schools: Robert Moore school in my community, which has to do fund-raising with students to pay for computers; Alexander MacKenzie, which has to do fund-raising with students to pay for playground equipment. Why don't you stick your $1-million propaganda campaign where it will do some good? Why don't you quit your campaign and give the moneys to the schools so they can buy the computers they need?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Mr Speaker, you looked a little concerned.

The Speaker: I was just as worried as you were for a minute there, but it wasn't out of order.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Perhaps the leader of the third party would like to read this document before he asks questions in the House. It's called The Road Ahead. It's from the Education Improvement Commission and it spells out their recommendations, one of which is that the province move to have teachers in school a full week before students arrive. We have adopted that.

We said this morning that we believe instructional time and time on tests for our students in the province can be increased without expanding the school calendar. The EIC reports to us they have recommended two thirds of that in their report. We think we can find the other third inside of that time. I have asked my colleagues to help me to consult with people to design just that.

Regarding our advertisements that have gone out, the mailout has gone out to every household in the province to tell them about a better education in Ontario. We think that's good information. If the leader of the third party is worried about costs, he might want to look at the full-colour brochure his government sent out to inform the people of Ontario. He might want to read the letter from the then Minister of Education, with the picture of the then Minister of Education and compare that with our —

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Quinte, come to order, please.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I'm referring to the backgrounder that he put out last week when he made his announcement. In that backgrounder on page 2 it says,

"The Education Improvement Commission has recommended that the school year for elementary students be increased by two weeks and for secondary school students by three weeks," and then it says, "The legislation would allow the province to act on these recommendations."

It didn't say that the teachers would be in an extra week; it said the students. It also justified that on the basis of increasing the contact between teachers and students. Maybe the minister can explain how he increases the contact between teachers and students if he legislates that teachers go back, but not students.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I've got to say I'm not shocked at the —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Mr Speaker, I am surprised at the question from the member for Algoma, because the member for Algoma usually has read the reports and usually is briefed upon this subject, and he apparently is not.

The Education Improvement Commission suggested that we increase the amount of instructional time that students sit. They suggested two weeks for elementary school students; they suggested three weeks for secondary school students. We think it's a good idea. We think it will improve education. We think it will improve the students' performance. They suggested that we reduce the number of exam days allowed for secondary school students, the number of PA days that happen during the school year.

I can tell the member for Algoma that I was speaking with parents on Monday of this week and they suggested that if we had teachers come in the week before students, perhaps they wouldn't lose all the half days at the start of the year getting ready for the students, perhaps they could have more instructional time at the end of June, perhaps they could use the calendar better to find those five additional days. That would be preferable to parents than adding to the school year. I think those are good suggestions we've heard from parents, and we intend to listen to them and act on them.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I have a question for the Minister of Health. I'd like to talk to you about the situation in London. We've heard there in recent days about a critical situation to do with ICU beds, and now general surgery beds are also a huge problem.

Today there was a story about a 70-year-old who went to London from Thunder Bay for heart surgery and he's experiencing something that I believe people are going to call the Harris hospital boomerang. He is recovering from heart surgery in London and the people there would like him to go back to Thunder Bay, but there are no beds in Thunder Bay for him to go back to because they are squeezed between two Harris hospital cuts. You took $55 million out of the hospitals in London in the last two years. You're going to take more beds away.

My question is, what will you do to help this 70-year-old stranded in London find a bed?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I spoke with Mr Tony Dagnone, the administrator of the hospital, about two hours ago on the phone. He said there's no basis for this story. Again, the Minister of Health is not responsible. You are to direct your questions to the hospital. You would have found out that the family went to the media because — the hospital's not sure why the family went to the media. The woman in the story says they are getting excellent care.

The solution to the problem, though, if there is a problem, is that there will be more beds in Thunder Bay. There are new transitional beds. I haven't got the note in front of me now, but what the story points out — and I can only go by the story at this point — with respect to the alternative levels of care beds, it's a new type of bed the commission is recommending in communities like Thunder Bay, and some in London and Toronto and right across the province, called transitional beds, which will take the pressure off the acute care beds.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): There are no beds in Thunder Bay.

Hon Mr Wilson: "Bed blockers" is a term that came forward when the Liberals were in office in the 1980s. That was the problem. You did nothing about it, folks.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Fort William, you must withdraw that comment you made earlier.

Mrs McLeod: You mean about it not being true that there are beds in Thunder Bay, Mr Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes, that comment. You must withdraw it.

Mrs McLeod: I withdraw that comment.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Supplementary.

1420

Mr Kennedy: There's a reason why this family had to go to the media, because there's no point, as you've just demonstrated, in going to the Minister of Health. When families are told that their loved ones have to leave hospitals and are told by those hospitals it's because of your cuts, because there are no beds available, they expect at least some response from you, Minister.

You've closed the chronic care hospital in Thunder Bay, you've put those beds into an acute care hospital. They don't have the space. They've got 60 people taking up those beds. Minister, is it your responsibility. You may say it isn't, but everybody in this House knows it's your job. It's your job to find this gentleman, 70 years old, a bed. It's your job to make sure there is something available for him.

Will you at least allow some funding to go back into Thunder Bay or into London so that this gentleman and others don't find themselves squeezed? Will you at least admit that the hospitals in London have been cancelling surgery, no ICU beds? They can't fit people in and now they can't even send people back. Will you at least admit there's a problem and that you will do something about it?

Hon Mr Wilson: Hospital restructuring is designed to correct exactly the situation the honourable member de-

scribes. There will be more of these transitional beds to get rid of the bed blockers that you did nothing about.

Second, the honourable member is completely misinformed about the role of the Minister of Health in this province and in this country. I can't micromanage the system. If there's a complaint, it must go to the hospital board, which is a group of citizens who have a responsibility for running that hospital. In this case and in every case, I would ask that you ask the hospital. Give these good people who have the responsibility for operating the hospital the opportunity to respond and solve the problems at the local level.

I cannot, no matter how hard you wish, direct one doctor to do one thing in this province. I cannot keep a patient in or discharge a patient. That is not under the law something the Minister of Health can do. Maybe you think you can, maybe you want to micromanage the system. I have faith in the doctors, I have faith in the nurses, I have faith in the administration that if —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Members for Windsor-Sandwich and Ottawa West, come to order.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Grey-Owen Sound): Throw him out.

The Speaker: Member for Grey-Owen Sound, it would be helpful if you came to order as well.

Interjections.

The Speaker: We will wait. Minister.

Hon Mr Wilson: The honourable member is getting a terrible reputation across the province of, first of all, not having —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister.

Hon Mr Wilson: London is one of the best health care areas in Ontario. I would ask the honourable member to leave the chamber, go talk to the administration there and get his facts straight. Your own hospitals condemned you for not getting your facts straight. Now you've taken it upon yourself to upset the good people in London. The patient in question is getting good care. The patient was never in danger of being discharged without a plan in place.

I wish the honourable member would check his facts before he brings those cases. You brought a case to the Legislature earlier this week and you couldn't have been more wrong in that case. The fact of the matter is he does put me at a disadvantage. He takes advantage of the fact that the minister cannot talk about the details of a case. All I can do is ask you to please check your facts —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like you to rule on the word "bed blocker," whether that is a parliamentary word or not. I think he referred to patients as bed blockers. Is that a parliamentary word?

The Speaker: That's parliamentary. I would assume that's some technical term they use in the Ministry of Health. I don't know.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Holy smokes, don't start heckling me. That's just my opinion. I assume that is a technical term.

HEALTH CARDS

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): My question is also to the Minister of Health. Yesterday you announced a series of measures that you're going to be taking to cut down on health care fraud. I think everyone in the province wants to be sure that our health dollars are used appropriately, that no one is taking advantage of the system.

My concern around your announcement was that you stated that as of January 1 the Ministry of Health will no longer allow health care providers to give the benefit of the doubt, and that only when people are clearly in an emergency situation would they get health care without a health card.

I wonder if you've really given much thought to this, because the fact is that the majority of people who present themselves in need of care without a health card prove in the course of things to be entitled to health care in Ontario.

There are many reasons why people don't have a health card. They may have had their ID stolen, including their health card, or when they want to apply for a health card they may not have access to their identification. They may be homeless and may not have belongings. They may be entitled, but for whatever reason don't have them.

Minister, can you tell us what you're going to do about these people?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): The reports in the media were not meant to be taken exactly at face value in terms of —

Interjections.

Hon Mr Wilson: Common sense dictates that everyone in the province right now agrees with the honourable member and agrees with what I said yesterday, yes, but at the end of the day if you're ineligible. Yes, a lot of people don't have it on them. I don't have mine on me right now. But during my time in hospital, if that should happen, I would have the opportunity to present a valid card.

At the end of the day, though — this isn't a change in law; this is just an enforcement of what the law has been right across this country under the Canada Health Act — if you're not eligible, you're not eligible. You'll be swiping your Visa card and not your health card. But you'll be given ample opportunity to show that you are eligible for health benefits in Ontario.

Mrs Boyd: Then I'm not quite clear what the difference is. I guess my real concern is that's not exactly what's happening. Let me tell you the story of a 21-year-old woman who last spring presented herself at Doctors Hospital because she wasn't feeling well. She didn't have a health card, but she had lived in Ontario all her life. The hospital told her they'd treat her, but she needed to pay $25 down. She didn't have it, so she left.

The next day she was feeling worse. She went to the Toronto Western Hospital. She was told they would treat

her, but she would be billed. She didn't have the money, so she left.

Two days later she was admitted as an emergency to the Wellesley Hospital because her fever was life-threatening. She occupied a bed there for four days. It turns out she had a urinary tract infection that could have been treated on the first day for very little cost, and it cost us all a great deal of money.

All I'm suggesting to you is that, first of all, we need to be setting up procedures that are consumer-friendly in terms of getting the health cards, and second of all, people aren't being turned away with minor conditions because they're being told they're going to be charged up front because they don't have a health card. How are we going to deal with these very expensive mistakes?

Hon Mr Wilson: The difference is, we're told — and no government has the exact figure to what extent this is going on; we'll know better because of our new program — many people apparently go through our system now and no one ever checks. They might mention the health card but they never follow up. They have to eventually have a valid health card. If there's any doubt at the point of service, they can ask for other ID. They can phone the Ministry of Health. There are a number of things that can be done. Again, emergency services must be covered, but they have to be true emergencies.

Yes, we are cracking down on fraud. We all know anecdotal stories of people coming from other countries and from other jurisdictions, where they haven't paid taxes here, they don't have eligibility here, and they're supposedly receiving health services. That's what we want cut down on, without, as the honourable member has pointed out, jeopardizing care and access for our own residents and those who are entitled to health benefits in Ontario.

1430

CROSS-BORDER TRAVEL

VOYAGES TRANSFRONTALIERS

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke-Rexdale): My question is directed to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, and it relates to the concern many people have raised in my riding regarding the proposed new immigration law that would require, under section 110 of this new law, that all Canadians and foreigners would have to register both coming from and going into the United States and fill out additional visa information documents.

Exiger un visa aux Canadiens et aux Canadiennes qui veulent entrer aux États-Unis est non seulement contre une longue tradition mais remet aussi en question tout notre travail concernant le libre-échange.

Minister, I have a lot of companies and workers who are very concerned about this whole thing —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Minister.

Hon William Saunderson (Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism): I'm very pleased to respond to the member for Etobicoke-Rexdale. It certainly is a big concern.

There's no doubt that if section 110 of the new US immigration law was enacted, there would be long lineups and confusion at the borders. Such gridlocks would be bad for Ontario, not only for transportation and business, but for tourism as well.

More than 76 million trips — and I want to emphasize that — were made by Canadians to the United States last year. Ontario exported $116 billion worth of merchandise to the US last year. Our trade development strategy has increased our merchandise exports 6% in the first six months of this year. Clearly our tourism initiatives also have helped, because we attracted over 26 million Americans to Ontario in 1996.

Gridlocks at border crossings would discourage tourists on both sides of the border. Enacting this law would certainly be counterproductive at a time when we are trying to dismantle barriers to free trade.

Mr Hastings: If this law gets implemented unchanged, how will you provide for preventing an unmitigated disaster, Minister?

Interjections.

Hon Mr Saunderson: This is no laughing matter. This is a very serious matter that we should be considering. I'm happy to say that I have written to Mr Axworthy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa, expressing my concerns about this matter and asking him to please keep us informed of the developments. I've also spoken to Mr Gregory Johnson, the US consul general in Toronto, outlining the ramifications of such a law. He responded by saying that he took the issue very seriously and would be conveying my message and our concern to Washington.

I want to conclude by saying that my staff are in touch with federal officials in Ottawa and also in Washington to make sure we get a speedy resolution of this problem so that Ontarians and Canadians will not be concerned and our trade will not be interrupted, nor will our tourism be damaged.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Health. Since your government has taken office, you have proceeded to cut a total of $56 million out of Hamilton-area hospitals, both in capital and operating costs, in the past two years.

Minister, there is a crisis in hospital care in the city of Hamilton and surrounding areas. We have examples. One gentleman suffered a stroke and was left for hours in a wheelchair in an emergency room without a doctor to see him, without a stretcher being available. That's under your jurisdiction. We had a woman who has a rare condition that needs treatment. Because of her condition, it takes her husband four hours to get her ready to go to the hospital for treatment. In the past three months on four occasions she got there and there was not a bed available. She was sent home. We had a situation in the backyard of your

minister of seniors where Joe Brant hospital had to convert a boardroom into an emergency waiting room.

You have created this crisis before your commission — what are you going to do —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Minister.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): Again, the honourable member is encouraged to discuss those individual cases with the hospital and the public hospital board there. I'd be interested to know what their response is. I encourage the honourable member to do that.

Mr Agostino: I have discussed these cases with the families, with the doctors and with the hospitals. In every single case they have said it is because of the cuts you have made to the health care system in Hamilton that people are sitting in wheelchairs without a stretcher being available, that this woman cannot get a bed. Every single case has been blamed on you and the cuts of your government, and this is before your thugs on the restructuring commission create havoc in Hamilton next month.

It's been estimated that as a result of the cuts that are being made there, as a result of what is happening in the districts around Hamilton, there will be at least 4,500 more patients from outside the city who are going to need services in Hamilton next year. Your commission is going to come in in about a month and close at least one Hamilton hospital.

Minister, you have a crisis in Ottawa, you have a crisis in Windsor, you have a crisis in Thunder Bay. You are going to create a crisis. Can you tell me what proactive action you're going to take to guarantee to the people of Hamilton that you're going to avert this crisis that is going to occur once your restructuring commission comes to town and decides that it's going to close our hospitals?

Hon Mr Wilson: So far the restructuring commission has been very positive in increasing services in every area of the province. The law is very clear that it can't cut services. The honourable member is making the case of the need to restructure. Obviously the status quo isn't good enough in Hamilton.

I was just in Hamilton last week and I was at probably the hospitals you're talking about, at least one of them, and certainly had no indication of what the honourable member's talking about. However, I do have indication from all of your hospitals in Hamilton that they would like to see the commission come in, that they realize the status quo isn't an option, that they would like the cooperation of their local MPPs.

They do not need the word "crisis" thrown around as they try and improve the health care system and increase services for a growing and aging population, something that your party failed to do, that should have been done 10, 15 years ago. It's unfortunate that it's happening in a short period of time, but we will have a better system with more services to serve more patients.

TVONTARIO

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Citizenship and Culture and communications. On September 11 and 12, Wawatay radio and Wahsa distance education stopped broadcasting to protest your government's intentions to privatize TVOntario. They wanted to let their listeners in the far north know what it would be like after you privatize TVOntario and they no longer have a carrier to help them put out their broadcasting signal. You see, they use the TVO satellite to broadcast education and information programs to 35 first nation communities in the remote far north.

Minister, in your drive, in your rush to sell off TVOntario, can you tell us what plans you have to ensure that Wawatay and Wahsa distance education continue to broadcast?

Hon Marilyn Mushinski (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation): I refer that question to the minister responsible for privatization.

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister without Portfolio [Privatization]): The leader of the third party is well aware of the fact that a very important part of our privatization review framework is to take a look at the different options and alternatives that are available to bring in the private sector to help us manage the businesses government is involved in in a different and more effective way. Part of the process, of course, is to involve the public in some consultation. We think Ontarians have a role to play in this process and we intend to listen to what they say and respond to initiatives such as the one he just spoke to.

1440

Mr Hampton: I asked a very specific question. These are two education and public information broadcasters that would go off the air. They are able to broadcast now because TVOntario includes them on TVOntario's satellite signal because they see it as part of TVOntario's mandate.

The reality is, if Wahsa distance education goes off the air, all kinds of people in those 35 remote first nation communities will not receive any educational programming in their own language. If Wawatay goes off the air, there will be no public information program in the Cree or Ojicree language.

I've asked a specific question and I still didn't get an answer. The Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation doesn't know. Can the minister of privatization tell us? Have you any plans whatsoever to ensure that Wahsa distance education continues to broadcast and Wawatay radio continues to broadcast after you privatize TVO?

Hon Mr Sampson: I thought I did answer the member's question by saying that we believe all Ontarians have a role to play and some advice to provide as we assess the options and alternatives as they relate to TVO. Of course we'll listen to their concerns and their issues. That's why we have that very important part of our process, so that we can listen to what Ontarians say and have them help us assess the alternatives that are available to us

to bring private sector to partner with government in providing a much better and more cost-effective service to Ontarians.

HOME CARE

Mr Derwyn Shea (High Park-Swansea): My question is directed to the minister responsible for seniors. You will be aware that I have a long-standing interest in and support of long-term care in the province of Ontario, particularly for Runnymede hospital. In light of some questions raised earlier today in the House and in response to last night on the CBC national newscast, home care was described as the future of health care in Canada. The reporter interviewed several patients who appreciated the opportunity to receive care outside of hospitals and nursing homes.

Governments across Canada are recognizing the value of home care. I would ask the minister if home care is a priority for the government and whether that priority is being backed up with the necessary funding.

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): I think members of this House would be pleased to know that Ontario is spending over $1.2 billion on home care, community-based supports, and a further over $1.2 billion on institutional-based care extended outside of a hospital setting for the frail elderly and the disabled in this province. We are spending record numbers of dollars to provide decent home care in this province and we have expanded it significantly in many parts of the province. It also forms part of a $170-million community-based funding increase this government has invested.

I have visited Runnymede with the honourable member. We have looked at the program and its impact, making sure that sufficient home care services are available, and I'm pleased to report that in the member's constituency area, funding for home care in Metro Toronto stands at $130 million today, and that's a $75 million dollars increase since —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Supplementary.

Mr Shea: My supplementary is also for the minister responsible for seniors. The National report addressed the related questions of how individuals can find out about home care available to them and fears that it might not be available. In spite of federal government cuts to our nation's health care system, can he assure the House that Ontario residents can get the services they need?

Hon Mr Jackson: We have increased substantively the amount of dollars to recognize growth. These are dollars that are being directly applied to the assessed needs in communities all across the province. There are some areas that are overserviced and moneys are going directly to communities. The member for St Catharines has had his community traditionally underserviced in this province. We've flowed additional dollars there. There are one or two communities that are overserviced and they're not getting additional dollars. They are expected to deliver the service fairly, equitably and efficiently as well.

I want to remind all members that in an Ontario where for 12 years not one new nursing home or long-term-care bed was approved by either the Liberal or NDP government, the system has problems we are addressing immediately by flowing these home care dollars into community settings to provide compassionate care and appropriate care. There are no waiting lists. There is demand, but there are no waiting lists within this province for home care at this time.

KIDNEY DIALYSIS

Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): My question is for the Minister of Health, who has disappeared momentarily.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Put the question. He'll probably —

Interjection: Here he is.

The Speaker: Okay, go ahead.

Mr Cleary: My question is to the Minister of Health. It has been over a year and a half since you announced that you had chosen a provider for dialysis treatment in Cornwall, but you soon withdrew the deal when you got caught up in a legal battle. Now, 18 months later, you've dropped your appeal, so the court proceedings are over and so is the 30-day waiting period that you said you required, but you've failed to give a progress report.

At this point, Cornwall and area residents are uncertain if and when they might receive dialysis treatment. Hospital officials are asking what you are doing and if you are accepting proposals from all parties for space. I ask you for a full disclosure today on the Cornwall dialysis. Are there any outstanding issues? How many proposals are being considered? When do you think things will happen? And where do we go from here?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): If the honourable member would read the court's decision, he would know exactly what we're doing. It's a public document and he is welcome to read it. We are following the court's decision, which was to negotiate with Dr Posen. Dr Posen has made an arrangement to get rid of that American company that was so discredited by your party, which stopped the process. You've never explained that honestly to your constituents.

It was the member for Renfrew North and the member for Fort William —

The Speaker: I think that was unparliamentary. I would ask you to withdraw it.

Hon Mr Wilson: Speaker, I withdraw.

The way this went, a proper tender went out, a particular party won that tender, questions were raised in this House calling into question that tender and that put us into the court action. That's what happened. I haven't been free to this point to say because it has been tied up in court for over a year. So read your Hansard. That's the history.

Having said that, we're moving very positively in the future to do what the court directed, to negotiate with Dr Posen. Hopefully all that will get sorted out and new services will be up and running in Ottawa and Cornwall.

Mr Cleary: Minister, I can remember how frustrated you were when you were in opposition and you didn't have dialysis in your riding.

There have been 18 months of dithering around. After your announcement last spring, these people hoped they would be relieved of another winter's driving to Ottawa and Kingston. Please cut out the rhetoric today and tell the people of eastern Ontario that they won't have to drive again through these weather conditions. Instead, provide some comfort to these people by revealing today that the Cornwall dialysis facility will be treating patients this coming winter.

Hon Mr Wilson: That's certainly the intention. We were able to do that right across the province, with the exception of eastern Ontario because of the court case. Now that that has cleared, that is exactly what we're going to do. We have some 20 clinics up and running; they are already up and running. The proof is that the government's policy, my personal quest over the last seven years, I agree with the honourable member, has been very much fulfilled across the province.

Because of legal reasons we were unable to move in eastern Ontario until now, but I can assure the honourable member we're moving just as quickly as we possibly can, and we certainly are very much aware of the winter and the driving conditions your constituents would face, the same conditions my constituents faced, as you mentioned, and we will get you those services just as fast as we can.

1450

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I have a question to the Attorney General. I want to return to the issue of the drivers' licence suspension project that we raised yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. I need to hear these questions. I appreciate there are a lot of important meetings taking place as we speak, but I wish you'd come to order.

Ms Martel: Minister, on May 9 you said, "The testing of the suspension of drivers' licences will begin immediately to ensure a smooth and full implementation in September of 1997." Further in the press release you went on to say, "Other enforcement measures will be implemented later this year, including suspensions of drivers' licences, which is currently being tested." That was May 9.

Our information is quite different. Will you confirm in the House today that in fact you have not begun the drivers' licence suspension project at all and that when you do begin testing, you will only start with 100 drivers who are in default? Can you confirm that in the House today?

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): It's certainly our intention to begin the process of the enforcement measures to which the member refers. We've indicated we would do it in September, and it's going to happen in September.

PETITIONS

TVONTARIO

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have a petition that's directed to the minister responsible for privatization, and it's in opposition to privatizing TVOntario. It reads:

"We, the undersigned, oppose any plans to privatize TVOntario and strongly support TVO's proposal to convert the agency to a not-for-profit corporation. We, the undersigned, strongly urge the government of Ontario to ensure continued access by Wahsa and Wawatay radio to TVO's distribution system. The privatization of TVOntario would jeopardize the excellent educational and information programming provided by TVOntario. The sale of TVO to commercial interests would also jeopardize Wawatay radio network's native language programming, and Wahsa's distance education services, because both depend on TVO's distribution system."

I have attached my name to that petition as well.

CHILD CARE

Mr Frank Klees (York-Mackenzie): I have a petition that was brought to my attention by a constituent. I would like to read it, as follows:

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, draw the attention of the Legislature of Ontario to the following:

"That managing the family home and caring for infants and preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society and deserves respect and support;

"That child care policies and funding should provide equity and fairness to all Ontario families;

"Therefore, your petitioners call upon the Legislature,

"(a) to pursue policy and funding initiatives that will support a full range of child care choices such as extending the child care tax credit to all families, including those providing full-time parental care; and

"(b) to pursue discussions with the federal government to review the tax system to find ways to assist two-parent families where one parent chooses to remain at home."

I am pleased to add my name to this petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Windsor-Essex county was the first community to undergo hospital restructuring; and

"Whereas the community supported the recommendations of the Win-Win report based on a funding model that included the expansion of community-based care; and

"Whereas recent reports estimate that Windsor-Essex hospital expenditure is underfunded by approximately $122 per person; and

"Whereas this represents the lowest funding per capita for hospital services of any community in Ontario with a population of over 200,000; and

"Whereas hospitals across the province have been forced to further reduce expenditures 18%; and

"Whereas these cuts have forced hospitals to eliminate emergency services in the west end of Windsor and other desperately needed services; and

"Whereas the minister acknowledged that additional funding was necessary in high-growth areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister of Health to provide the appropriate level of funding to hospitals in Windsor-Essex which would allow Windsor Regional Hospital to provide urgent care services for the west-end community and to restore equitable health care funding across Windsor and Essex county."

Like hundreds of my fellow Windsorites I affix my signature to this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition regarding the call for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry into the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

We're not backing away from this demand for one minute.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): I have a petition from a small number of the residents of my riding of Peterborough expressing their concern with the change of services between the province and at the municipal level.

KIDNEY DIALYSIS

Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas there is no dialysis treatment currently available in Cornwall; and

"Whereas the lack of local medical treatment forces dialysis patients throughout Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry and beyond to drive to Ottawa and Kingston, sometimes several times each week, even during dangerous winter weather conditions, to receive the basic medical attention, incurring unnecessary stress and cost; and

"Whereas the Minister of Health promised on April 24, 1996, to rectify this medical shortfall by establishing a dialysis treatment facility in Cornwall; and

"Whereas this promise made by the Minister of Health has, to date, not been kept, resulting in local patients and their families travelling to Ottawa and Kingston for treatment several times a week;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to ensure that the Minister of Health follows through on his commitment made last April to set up a long-awaited dialysis and much-needed health service in the Cornwall area."

That's signed by residents from the Cornwall area.

PAY EQUITY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding pay equity in Bill 136:

"Whereas the Harris government has introduced Bill 136; and

"Whereas Bill 136 strips entitlements to employee status and therefore pay equity rights for home child care providers; and

"Whereas home child care providers are predominantly female; and

"Whereas home child care providers are one of the lowest-paid groups of workers in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136 and its implications for the Pay Equity Act."

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I add my name to theirs.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): I have a petition that's signed by 54 constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas communities strongly disagree with allowing women to go topless in public;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To enact legislation to require women to wear tops in public places for the protection of our children and for public safety in general."

I sign this so it becomes a record of the assembly.

1500

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): This is a petition on secondary school reform in Ontario.

"Dear Minister:

"We believe that the heart of education in our province is in the relationship between students and teachers and that this human and relational dimension should be

maintained and extended in any proposed reform. As the Minister of Education and Training, you should know how strongly we oppose many of the secondary school reform recommendations being proposed by your ministry and government.

"We recognize and support the need to review secondary education in Ontario. The proposal for reform as put forward by your ministry, however, is substantially flawed in several key areas: (a) reduced instruction time, (b) reduction in instruction in English, (c) reduction of qualified teaching personnel, (d) academic work experience credit not linked to educational curriculum, (e) devaluation of formal education.

"We strongly urge your ministry to delay the implementation of secondary school reform so that all interested stakeholders — parents, students, school councils, trustees and teachers — are able to participate in a more meaningful consultation process which will help ensure that a high quality of publicly funded education is provided."

I affix my signature to this petition.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition regarding the review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

"Whereas workers' health and safety must be protected in the province of Ontario, especially the right to refuse work which is likely to endanger a worker, the right to know about workplace hazards and the right to participate in joint health and safety committees; and

"Whereas the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations help protect workers' health and safety and workers' rights in this area; and

"Whereas the government's discussion paper, Review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, threatens workers' health and safety by proposing to deregulate the existing act and regulations to reduce or eliminate workers' health and safety rights and to reduce enforcement of health and safety laws by the Ministry of Labour; and

"Whereas workers must have a full opportunity to be heard about this proposed drastic erosion in their present protections from injuries and occupational diseases;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose any attempt to erode the present provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations. Further we, the undersigned, demand that public hearings on the discussion paper be held in at least 20 communities throughout Ontario."

I proudly add my name to theirs.

COURT DECISION

Mr John L. Parker (York East): I have a petition here signed by eight Ontario residents relating to the recent Ontario court decision relating to toplessness in public. It expresses disapproval of that decision and it makes recommendations as to municipal bylaws and federal legislation to address the matter.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): I have a petition here that was submitted to me by Ted Loughead, the staff representative of OPSEU, Region 4, in Kingston and it deals with Bill 136. It is addressed to the Honourable Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the following undersigned citizens of Ontario, beg leave to petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Bill 136, the Public Sector Dispute Resolution Act, 1997, will not meet its stated objective to facilitate collective bargaining in the event of mergers and amalgamations; and

"Further, if enacted, Bill 136 will interfere with collective bargaining, impose a new bureaucratic and dictatorial regime, remove the right to fair and impartial arbitration of disputes and the right to strike; and

"Whereas the Ontario Labour Relations Board has a long and successful history of mediating labour disputes;

"Therefore, in the interest of maintaining and enhancing quality public services provide by dedicated public employees, we hereby petition the Ontario government to withdraw its proposed Bill 136 legislation and support a fair and workable system that will not disrupt the supply of public services to the community or the livelihoods of thousands of Ontarians."

It's signed by approximately 40 individuals and I have signed my name to it as well, as I am in complete agreement with same.

NURSING STAFF

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I have a petition here from a number of people from the community of Timmins. It reads as follows:

"Please help us send a message to our government by signing our petition to stop the cuts to nursing staff in nursing homes. Hopefully this petition will make a better life for the sick people and the elderly people of our community.

"Sick people are not asking to be sick. People at nursing homes are in need of special care.

"There are many disadvantages with the cuts in nursing staff that are to be made in the future. Disabled people will end up suffering more because they will not be getting the care they should have. Lack of proper care could lead to depression in some patients.

"At this moment, nurses have difficulty to keep up with their duties because there are so many sick patients in nursing homes. With the proposed cuts, the nurses left working will get exhausted from rushing too much, which could lead to accidents. Furthermore, nurses will end up being on sick leave because of stress and pressure because of the lack of other nurses. Just think of how these cuts would affect your family in special need of care."

This is by one of the residents in the nursing home and it was signed by a number of family members, totalling around 500 people. I affix my signature to that petition.

WATER CHLORINATION

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton North): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the chemical substance chlorine was added to the people of Milton's pure well water supply in 1995; and

"Whereas recent studies on the use of chlorine additives in drinking water have raised the spectre of chlorine as a possible cancer agent; and

"Whereas the people of the town of Milton overwhelmingly supported the belief that a standby chlorination requirement is sufficient enough to prevent the spread of a serious bacterial threat;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Be it resolved that the Ontario government grant the people of Milton's request for a variance allowing only standby chlorination to be used in treating the pure well water supplies for Milton's water delivery system."

I'm in agreement with this and I will affix my signature to it, there being over 3,000 signatures now on these petitions.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government has failed to address the root causes of waste, duplication and unnecessary administration in our health care system; and

"Whereas the provincial government has instead introduced Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, that makes it easier for employers to reduce the number of front-line staff and to lower their salaries and benefits and thus causing further deterioration in quality patient care; and

"Whereas Bill 136 also erodes the democratic process by tampering with collective agreements and potentially interfering with workers' choice of bargaining agents;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, and restructure the health care system in a safe, coordinated and rational way."

I've added my name to that petition as well.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

UNIFORM FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'HARMONISATION DES LIGNES DIRECTRICES FÉDÉRALES ET PROVINCIALES SUR LES ALIMENTS POUR LES ENFANTS

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 128, An Act to amend the Family Law Act to provide for child support guidelines and to promote uniformity between orders for the support of children under the Divorce Act (Canada) and orders for the support of children under the Family Law Act / Projet de loi 128, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le droit de la famille pour prévoir des lignes directrices sur les aliments pour les enfants et pour promouvoir l'harmonisation entre les ordonnances alimentaires au profit des enfants rendues en vertu de la Loi sur le divorce (Canada) et celles rendues en vertu de la Loi sur le droit de la famille.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Member for Windsor-Sandwich, I believe you had the floor.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): We are continuing debate on Bill 128. I had the opportunity last time they had called this bill to be speaking to it and ended the day, so I am pleased to finish with the last nine minutes of it.

Bill 128 has to do with custody and support. Our greatest difficulty with the government coming forward with a bill of this nature is that the government goes forward with making changes without understanding the very nature of what it has done to family support in Ontario so far.

We know in the Windsor area that they closed a regional office. Before they closed the regional office, we petitioned the Attorney General, who actually went to law school in Windsor, who knows the system in Windsor very well. We said to the minister, "Minister, the Windsor regional office is one of your most fruitful regional offices for family support. It makes the government money in the amount it costs to run the office versus the kind of support it's able to garner from parents who are paying support. It makes some $25 million a year, far in excess of other regional offices just by virtue of the kind of industry we have in the Windsor area."

They closed the regional office anyway and instead went forward with some kind of new-fangled system, never tested, never tried, which was a complete and utter disaster.

Now you want to come forward with Bill 128 and say, "We think we've got something that's going to help the system." Friends, this government couldn't handle the original system, couldn't make a simple change to mechanics without creating much concern and strife for many families across Ontario, let alone just those in Windsor and Essex county.

The difficulty of coming here today to say, "Yes, you may make changes in the law somewhere," without understanding that this very government cannot be trusted to implement change — this government wants to be proud of bringing change to Ontarians. When you come from Windsor and Essex county, you see the kind of bulldozer, steamroller approach this government takes to change.

We have a hospital system in complete disarray because of that same mentality that you bring to bear in every ministry this government operates. The Minister of Health stands on his feet today and says: "I'm not responsible. I'm not in charge. I can't tell them all what to do." People of Ontario need to understand the Ontario government funds, and because they fund they also make people obliged to acts —

Interjection.

1510

Mrs Pupatello: — like the hospital act. This member from Sarnia wants to yell out.

Let's talk to the people from Lambton. They saw exactly what happened after a steamroller, bulldozer approach in Lambton. In fact, all the galleries here were full of people from this member's riding because they knew his government was not listening. They were not listening to the very people who saw change coming to Lambton, that the hospitals were going to be closed with no input, that they weren't going to be told where their services were going to come from.

Yesterday, my office in Windsor received frantic phone calls from the emergency services in Windsor. They called our office to say: "We need help. Somebody has to help us. We have a furious doctor running the emergency there, saying, 'I can't go into the waiting room to bring a patient into emergency to treat because I have nowhere to put the patient.'" These people are angry because those who are already in emergency don't have a bed to be sent to in the hospital because the hospital beds are all full of people who have to move into long-term-care beds which aren't there.

You think you are making change. I'm telling you that you're destroying any kind of confidence we could have in your hospital system, and believe me, you are going to own this one.

Today in the House the minister referred to these as "bed blockers." When you come from Windsor, these patients are not bed blockers. He may refer to them in that abstract manner because it's easier for him to deal with things that aren't real. Well, what we hear about are things that are real. These are patients who are being sent home, and in the end the patients —

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I've been sitting here listening and I have Bill 128 in my hand. I don't see anything about beds, I don't see anything about hospitals and I don't see anything about that.

The Acting Speaker: I get your point of order. Thank you. Take your seat. Member for Windsor-Sandwich, he does have a point. You must speak, under the rules, to Bill 128.

Mrs Pupatello: When we talk about Bill 128, we are talking about the kind of change this government wants to bring to bear to Ontarians. What you need to do before you change the law is make sure you have systems in place to deal with the law. This Attorney General should have lost his job months ago with the fiasco he created with family support, where people are losing their homes because they couldn't pay their mortgages because you decided to change the system. You decided to close regional offices but you didn't have a system in place.

Your government uses the same pattern in every ministry, and that is exactly the relationship of the Windsor hospital situation and this Bill 128. You forced the closure of emergency care out of Windsor Western on the west side of town with no expansion done at the other two sites.

Yesterday three ambulances waited at emergency at Hotel-Dieu Grace for an hour. They couldn't leave the hospital because a patient was still on a stretcher in the emergency with no bed to move the patient on to. That is the same pattern that is brought to bear with Bill 128 —

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Again, I believe the member for Windsor-Sandwich is wandering. She's not talking to the point. The bill is before us.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Windsor-Sandwich, please try and stay on Bill 128.

Mrs Pupatello: Thank you, Speaker. You'll understand that the pattern being set — when you make changes in one place you need to ensure that the environment is ready to make changes. Therefore, you don't close the regional office of family support before your computer system is working, so that you've tested it and tried it. Similarly, you do not close an emergency ward before the other two sites are expanded with sufficient beds, with enough bays for ambulances to pull into. That is exactly the connection. This pattern is the same.

You insist on making changes before you've prepared any groundwork out there — a steamroller, bulldozer approach to your government. What do we get instead? We get this kind of affiliation for patients: He wants to call them "bed blockers." These patients from Windsor are not bed blockers. The people that are sent home from emergency, only to die at home, are not bed blockers. These are people who pay taxes. The people with family support who can't pay their mortgage payment, what are they? Are they government blockers somehow? These are individuals who get family support and they should be able to pay a mortgage payment with money that is truly theirs. Instead, you close the regional office, there is no system in place for these people, and Bill 128 somehow is going to cure that.

Mr John L. Parker (York East): Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I'm just happy to remind you, and perhaps through you the member for Windsor-Sandwich, that we are still on Bill 128.

Mrs Pupatello: When we arrive and when we have an issue that you cannot turn around and say does not exist,

you'll continue to interrupt me because you don't want my point to get out there. That's what is happening in this House today. It's going to take an awful lot of that to try to stop me in this House, let me tell you.

We have an emergency report called for by the Minister of Health himself. It itemizes clearly that conditions are unsafe, undignified, that appropriate care is not being delivered in Windsor area hospitals. It is his report that he called for, that he must own up to, but today he chooses to stand and say: "I'm not responsible. It's not me. I haven't got anything I can do about that." If that's the case, give up the limo, give up the cheque, go back to being a backbencher and put somebody in charge who can bloody well do this job, because he's dealing with families, and when you come from Windsor it makes a difference.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I am pleased to be able to respond to the speech made by the member from Windsor. I think she was quite good at demonstrating the links that exist between this bill and the context of everything else that this government is doing. I think it was a superb job of demonstrating that you cannot look at this particular bill, Bill 128, without the context of looking at what the government's doing when it comes to children with hospitals; when it comes to what the government is doing around the family support plan; when it comes to what the government has done with welfare cuts; when it comes to what the government has done with the cuts to day care; when it comes to what the government has done when it comes to social housing; when it comes to the all-out attack that this government has made on working families and the children of this province over the last two and a half years.

As I say, I think the member for Windsor-Sandwich showed that there are links between Bill 128 and what this government is doing. I think she did a good job of showing those links. On the other issue that she spoke to, in regard to the family support plan, again the government gets nervous. They all stood up and said, "Madam Speaker, on a point of order: The member is talking about FSP and is not talking about Bill 128." The members of the government are nervous. They don't like it when members of the opposition, or even be it the public through the committee process, come to them and hold them to task on their decisions.

The reality is that you guys have messed up big time. The family support plan has never been in the disastrous state that it is in now, since Charles Harnick, the now Attorney General of the province of Ontario, has come to power and has made it a mess. He shut down the regional offices. They took all the files, they put them in boxes, then they shipped them off to Downsview, and nobody knew where they were. Meanwhile, support order changes and all kinds of things that needed to be dealt with weren't, and people who used to pay and never had a problem getting money to their spouses were being all messed up. Who's getting hurt? Again, it's the kids.

I congratulate the member. I think she demonstrated that this government, when it comes to children, has no record to be proud of.

Mr Parker: I listened with great interest to the comments opposite. Frankly, I thought I'd made an error in reading the order paper and I'd stumbled in on the wrong debate, because the subject we were here to discuss is Bill 128, which is a child support bill. What that has to do with the tale we were being told about hospitals in Windsor is beyond me.

If we had been hearing a discussion about child support, we might have heard about the disaster that was left to this government by the previous government, with the boxes upon boxes with the dust already thick on those boxes of child support claims that were sitting in those regional offices throughout the province receiving no attention whatsoever. We would have been hearing about the countless phone calls that went totally unanswered, let alone answered and not responded to, by the previous government, and the mess, the Augean stables that this government has had to clean out in dealing with the mess that was left behind by the so-called family assistance plan left by the previous government, and what we are trying to do now to try to get out from under that.

There will be reason to cheer in the weeks ahead as the backlog left to us by the previous government is dealt with and we can get on with dealing with cases as they are currently being brought forward. Phone calls are being answered. Phone calls are being returned. Action is taking place, not something that's totally unknown in this province — it was unknown until this government took office. It's taking a while to get through the backlog that we were left with, yes, that's true, but we're just about through the backlog and we're on top of the current cases.

If the member for Windsor-Sandwich had been discussing Bill 128, we might have heard a little bit about the child support guidelines that are brought forward in Bill 128. We might have heard something about how Bill 128 will ensure the public has adequate information to make decisions on how best to proceed with their child support claims.

1520

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I was delighted to see the member tie in this bill with the entire government program, because that's what you have to do. You can't speak only about the bill in isolation. She was worried. She thought the government had sounded the bugles of retreat. The government appears to be in full panic the last couple of weeks. They're going from crisis to crisis, many of which they created themselves, and that's what she pointed out.

I was as astounded as she — she mentioned this in her speech — when the Minister of Health today referred to patients in hospital beds as bed blockers. I can't believe that. That demonstrates the bureaucratic, unfeeling approach that the government is taking to health care. The member wanted to mention that, and I don't blame her for mentioning that.

As well, she would recall that the Premier said a while ago that nurses were like hula hoops. He compared them to hula hoops. He said, "Hula hoops went out of style; people had to do something different," and he said that's what nurses would have to do. I know the nurses haven't forgiven the government for that, and I think the patients, when they hear that they are referred to as bed blockers, are going to be equally concerned. I'm glad the member mentioned that.

Several times government members, who are feeling very edgy today — they see the government diving in the polls, they see the government doing very poorly in by-elections, so they're starting to worry. They're running for cover now. So every time somebody mentions something that appears to be a little bit off topic when there's a bill before the House, the government members are up protesting. I am responding, of course, to what the member has had to say. I worry about that, because I know, for instance, that the government members tend to —

Mr Martiniuk: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: It had better be good.

Mr Martiniuk: Yes, it is good, Madam Speaker. Again, the Liberal Party seems to be wandering all over the place. The member for St Catharines knows the rules of this House, and he is ignoring them. The point —

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Member, take your seat. I get your point.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I want order, please. The members are giving their two-minute responses to the previous speaker, and they are allowed to say what they choose to say in response to that speech. Go ahead.

Mr Bradley: The member for Cambridge, the government member, has made my point just now. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): It's quite obvious that there is a lot of nervousness in this Legislature among the Conservative backbenchers as they go home for the weekend and hear all the commotion that is going on, and people are unhappy. They attack the comments that the member for Windsor-Sandwich is making on Bill 128. If you are going to have a discussion in this Legislature on Bill 128, surely you have to bring in all the mistakes that the Minister of Education has made as he has been trying to restructure the education system. One week he is saying one thing and another week he is saying another thing.

The Minister of Health is talking about patients who are in beds being bed blockers. You talk about a slap in the face — somebody is going in for surgery and spends time in hospital, and then you get the Minister of Health making comments of this kind.

The Minister of Education is saying, "I didn't mean that the students were going to have to go back one week earlier, a week before Labour Day; I meant that the teachers are going to have to go back one week before Labour Day." They've been doing that for the last 30 years. The Minister of Education doesn't even understand that the teachers have been going back one week or two weeks earlier, before September, to prepare their classes for the new year. All of a sudden the Minister of Education is saying: "There is some confusion out there. What I meant to say was it's an attack on teachers, it's not on students," and he doesn't understand the whole system. I understand it, as a lot of people from northern Ontario do.

The member for Windsor-Sandwich has explained fully that this government has no caring about women and children. The first thing they did when they came into government was to cut 21% or 22% of the money that they need for food, lodging and to pay the hydroelectricity. The most vulnerable people in society were given a slap on the face by this government, and they are continuing to do it over the last two and a half years. It's just one slap after another. I congratulate the member for Windsor-Sandwich.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Windsor-Sandwich, you can sum up.

Mrs Pupatello: One of these days, the MPPs from all over Ontario are going to understand what has happened to the health care system in Windsor, because it's coming to a community near you. The pace of change and the pattern is so completely backwards. Just like it is with family support, so it is with health care, and you will understand when it's in your backyard and when it's your constituents who are being affected like mine are. So every one of you who wants to heckle and interrupt is going to learn sooner rather than later that your health minister wants not to be responsible, but he is, and you have a responsibility as a provincial government to provide the right level of funding for quality care in this province.

Because our community was ahead of the game, we have spent millions of dollars never to be reimbursed by that ministry. Your Premier doesn't have the gall or the nerve to come into my community, other than at the airport and barely stepping off the curb during an election campaign, to even come and see for himself what kind of situation we have in Windsor.

Any one of you who wants to question the credibility of the issues, I invite you personally to come to my riding. I will personally give you a tour. I will introduce you to Conservatives who are helping me with this fight, because this is not about what party you belong to; this is about what kind of health care we get.

Some of your members already know this, because several of your members voted in favour of my private member's bill to completely abolish the health commission that is causing the destruction at the behest of the Premier of Ontario. You cannot get away with this kind of thing without hurting people. This will come home to roost — it will take us time to get this message out — because eventually this is coming to your own backyard. Unfortunately, Windsor was first. We are the canary in the coal mine here. Everything that you are doing today is not allowing us to go forward with good, positive health care in the Windsor community, and you will learn this.

The Acting Speaker: Before we continue with debate, I want to say two things to the members. Number one, I

want to remind the members that you are supposed to, under the rules, stick to generally — you all know we're fairly lenient here — the contents of the bill, which is Bill 128 today. Number two, I want to say to members that you have the right at any time to stand up on a point of order, and I appreciate that, but I would also appreciate that the members show respect for each other and not stand up on two-minute rebuttals unless you're absolutely clear. Use your common sense, if I may say so, and make sure —

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Seriously, show some respect for each other, because when you interrupt somebody in a two-minute rebuttal, you realize that they lose most of their time. Of course I will take your point of order, but I would ask all members to please think carefully and make sure that your point of order is legitimate and fair. Thank you. Further debate?

1530

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): It gives me pleasure to be able to join in this debate on Bill 128 that is dealing with family support. I'll try and keep on the important highlights of family support, because this is an issue that I heard about during the campaign leading up to September 4, but I can tell members in the House that I heard about a lot of other concerns from voters in Windsor-Riverside as well. Many people were saying that this government was moving too far, too fast, and they were concerned —

Interjection: And in the wrong direction.

Mr Lessard: And in the wrong direction as well. They were concerned because they were seeing a crisis in emergency care in the hospitals in our community. They saw the prospect of closing parts of hospitals in the community without changes being made to adequately address those closures. They were seeing a health care system in crisis in the Windsor area and they had a great deal of concern about that. The member for Windsor-Sandwich touched on that during her remarks as well. It's really difficult to try and speak just about family support as an issue I heard during the campaign without really considering everything about this government's agenda over the last two years. All these things fit together.

As this government was moving ahead with its agenda, something else I heard during the campaign that people were concerned about was the fact that the health care cuts were affecting our community, cuts to education were affecting our community and cuts to environmental protection were affecting our community. We had a very effective regional office in Windsor that was protecting the environment, that was out investigating spills, that was making sure our drinking water was safe to drink. That's an office that has been cut in half over the last year and a half as far as staff are concerned, since this government got elected in 1995. That was something that people were concerned about as well and told me about during the election.

Family support did come up, because there were many people in my riding who were concerned about the closure of the regional family support office in Windsor and the impact that was having, especially on women and children who were unable to get the support they needed to survive. We're talking mostly about support that was due to children to provide clothing, to provide housing and to provide food. They were having problems getting the support payments that were being made to the family support plan by their spouses. Those payments weren't getting to the people who needed that money to survive.

In this government's expediency in moving too far, too fast and in the wrong direction, in closing hospitals, in cutting health care, in cutting protection to the environment and downloading responsibilities on to municipalities, there are certain things this government overlooked. I know some of the members opposite are going to say: "You're complaining about the government moving too far, too fast. Here's a bill we should be moving faster on." Everybody agrees this is a bill that should have been passed last May actually, or even before, because this bill deals with uniformity of support orders between federal and provincial legislation.

Before coming to this place on September 4, I was a lawyer in private practice — not a family law lawyer, but I had occasion to deal with family law cases. I know these federal support guidelines were introduced well over a year ago. The proposals for the legislation for the federal support guidelines were suggested well over a year ago. They've been subject to debate in the House of Commons, they've been subject to debate among lawyers and people in the legal profession. They make a lot of sense.

They take out a lot of the arguing and the bickering between spouses that say, "I should be receiving a certain level of support for a whole number of different issues." The federal guidelines say that if your income is a certain amount and this is the number of children you have, then this is the amount of support you should pay. That's something that makes sense.

Frankly, I think most people would fail to understand why it has taken this government so long to bring in and implement legislation that falls along the side of the federal guidelines, given the amount of time they've taken to put those federal guidelines into place. This is legislation that mirrors those federal guidelines.

For many people the distinction is very difficult to understand, but just to give some explanation to people who may be watching this, when it comes to couples who are legally married, in order to end that relationship they have to get a divorce. Divorces are done through courts and through the federal legislation. That, of course, is the process under which a judge will set the amount of support, if any, that is going to be paid by one spouse to the other or children.

There's also a great number of people who don't fall within the jurisdiction of the federal divorce legislation because they haven't been legally married. They may be living in common-law relationships; they may be living in relationships where they have children but they haven't gotten married. Those people who break up obviously have an obligation to support their children and this legis-

lation recognizes that. I think it's important that it does acknowledge that every parent of a child continues to have an obligation to support that child. It's important that we remind people of the obligation they have.

How is that obligation enforced if it's not an action that takes place in divorce court but actually takes place in provincial court? That's something we need to look at. In Windsor we had a regional office that was providing for the effective enforcement of support orders that had been made in provincial court. We've seen that office closed since this government was elected in 1995, and people who never had any problem getting their support after 1990 started to have all kinds of problems after 1995, when that office was closed.

I brought up a case just the other day during question period that wasn't really just a problem with enforcement. There are a great number of other problems that we're having. We've heard from a number of people who have said: "I spoke to my spouse. They said that they paid the money to the family support plan. They paid it on time, but we don't have the money. It never got to us. We don't have any money for groceries or to pay the rent. What are we supposed to do?" Of course, they can't pay them directly. They have to pay through the family support plan. They're in a lot of trouble, a lot of difficulty, if they don't get that money after it's been paid by the payor. You really have to wonder what's happening with all that money.

The case I brought up the other day, of Sharon Stockford, was a case where she wasn't having a problem getting the money that was owed to her; the problem was that her circumstances changed. She had a child who had moved out of the house and therefore wasn't really entitled to the level of support that she has actually been getting. What she wanted to do was simply to get in touch with somebody from this government and say: "This support order needs to be changed. You're collecting too much money and you're giving me too much money, and it needs to be changed." She wasn't able to get in touch with anybody. She's tried to call the 800 number; there's no answer. She's tried to write a letter; there's no response. She sends faxes; there's no response. It's a simple thing to get that order changed, you would think. All she had to do was find somebody in this government who was going to be able to listen to her and make some change, and she wasn't able to do that.

She called our office and we tried to do the same thing. We try to call the 800 number. We don't get any response either.

In August — this was before the election, but I can tell you that we were working on many of these cases during the election as well. We had people who were working on the election campaign doing case work. For a while, there was an 800 number and there was a person you could actually speak to at the other end. But now when you call that number, it just goes right to voice mail. There's nobody there to answer the phone any more. You leave a message on voice mail; there's never any response.

This is just another example of the incompetence of this government and the Attorney General as well. That's something we need to take into consideration when we're talking about passing this legislation to unify —

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Come on, member for Kingston and The Islands.

Mr Lessard: — orders for support under the Divorce Act and the Family Law Act as well.

The Attorney General had the gall to say to me in response to my question that he had called my constituency office and the phones were disconnected or something like that. It's not my phones that are disconnected, it's the Attorney General's phones that are disconnected. There's nobody there to answer the Attorney General's phones. There's nobody there at the family support plan to answer the phones. We haven't had any problem with our telephones, Madam Speaker. I just want to assure you of that because that's something that does come within the jurisdiction of the Speaker's office. I can assure you that we haven't got any problem with our telephones. Anybody who calls our office gets someone to answer the phone and gets a response to their questions, and that's the way it should be.

1540

Mr Bisson: Except at the family support plan office.

Mr Lessard: At the family support plan they don't get that kind of service, and everybody who's called there knows that.

One of the things that does concern me about this legislation, Bill 128, is the fact that everybody thinks it's already passed. There have been advertising campaigns with respect to the federal guidelines, and anybody who's got a support order that's been made or who's been through provincial court already thinks that this is the law here in Ontario. They don't realize that this government hasn't gotten around to passing laws that affect provincial court orders up until this time and they're going to start making applications to the courts for variations of these existing orders.

What's going to happen when thousands of people make application at the same time for variations of their support orders? It really makes me wonder what impact that's going to have on our legal system, a legal system that is currently suffering under a burden of not enough people working in the courthouse, not enough courtrooms.

There are difficulties in the registrar's office in the courthouse in Windsor, I can tell you. If people want to make an application to vary their support order, they have to go and take one of those tickets off the doorway, like you get at the meat or the deli counter that tells you what number it is that you have to make your application at, and there are often times when you're going to spend at least two or three hours waiting in that line to file your application to get a variation to your support order.

What we really need is some streamlining of the system so that every time a person's financial circumstances change, for example, if a person who is paying support loses their job — and we know that if you're working in

the government of Ontario there's a higher prospect that you're going to be losing your job since this government got elected in 1995. But if you lose your job and your income changes and you therefore want to get your support order varied, there isn't a simple system to enable you to do that. It's unfortunate that isn't something that is provided for in this legislation.

Something else that isn't provided for in this legislation is indexing if inflation goes up, for example. There isn't any automatic provision in this legislation to increase those support orders. That's another case where if inflation rises rapidly again, which I hope we don't see, people will then also be faced with the prospect of having to make an application for variation and to go through the court system.

You know that oftentimes people who are applying for variations because they've lost their jobs don't have the income to pay for a lawyer. They don't have the financial means to do that. The first thing that people do is go down to the legal aid office and say: "I lost my job. I can't continue to pay the support that I owe. Can I get a certificate to provide me with a legal aid lawyer?" They're told they can't. There have been so many cuts to the legal aid plan since this government got elected that those who really need legal aid aren't going to be able to get a lawyer to make these applications they're entitled to.

What are they going to do? They're going to have to try and represent themselves. We're seeing a great number of people who are being forced through necessity to represent themselves in provincial court. Judges are going to have to take a lot more time to deal with people who are unrepresented in court. That's going to lead to huge backlogs, I suspect, in our court system.

But really what I heard most when I was out campaigning was from people who were concerned about enforcement mechanisms, people who say they've got their orders for support already but they're not getting that support. There were supposed to be some mechanisms that this government has promised on numerous occasions to bring in, like suspension of drivers' licences. I heard yesterday that this program has really been taking a long time to get in place and it isn't uniform across the province as far as the suspension of drivers' licences is concerned. We're really not sure when that's going to come into place.

I just bring that up as another example of some of the bungling that is attributed to the current Attorney General and the difficulty he's having not only with the family support plan but the legal aid plan and a number of other problems that are taking place in the Attorney General's office.

Really, the difficulties are with respect to enforcement. I'm having a number of people call my office now. These are parents who are calling. They're not getting the support and they're struggling to feed and house their families. This is something that should be a very simple process: A judge issues a court order; the Family Responsibility Office gets that order; they give it to the employer; the employer starts to make the payments; the employer forwards those payments to the Family Responsibility Office; they deposit the money or they send the payments out to the recipient.

But that isn't what's happening. What's happening now is just a complete mess. Families aren't getting the money, and payors don't have the money. It's been deducted from their salary already and the employer has sent the money to the Family Responsibility Office. Where does that money go? That's the problem we're faced with right now. Either it sits in a bag of mail or it's deposited into the wrong account — however, I really doubt that; I've rarely heard of people getting too much money in their accounts. Or has the Attorney General's cuts to the program completely crippled this plan?

Families are going without these payments. They call out of desperation. That's the reason they're calling our offices. I know they're not just calling my office; they're calling the government members' offices as well. This money has been allocated to them for the basic necessities of life: food, shelter and clothing. That's what's being denied to them because of the bungling of this government.

In my riding of Windsor-Riverside we have employers who have very large payrolls: Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, Hiram Walker. They have automated payrolls. The money comes out automatically and goes to the family support plan. But where does that money go? It's not going to the recipients. That's what they're calling and telling us about. The standard line from the Attorney General is that it must be somebody else's fault. "It's the payor's fault. They're not getting the money to us in time. The cheque's getting lost in the mail." It's always someone else's fault. But I want to say to the Attorney General that we know it's not somebody else's fault. We've heard this over and over again. This is the responsibility of the Attorney General and he needs to face up to that responsibility and take the actions necessary to clean up this mess.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Jack Carroll (Chatham-Kent): It's a pleasure to stand up and make some comments on the speech given by the member for Windsor-Riverside and to officially welcome him to the House. I've done it personally but this is the first chance I've had to do it publicly. It's nice to have him back again. It's obvious, though, that he's been here before, because he has the knack already in a very short period of time of standing up and talking about everything except the subject at hand. He made very small reference to Bill 128. He talked about education, health, legal aid, pretty well everything, but he did make some small reference to Bill 128.

He did talk about what we really need is more streamlining. Exactly right; what we really need is more streamlining. That's what Bill 128 is all about. I'm glad to see that he acknowledged that. He has picked up on some of the lingo. Some of the jargon has become very popular in this place, because at the very beginning of his speech he talked about "too far, too fast."

Mr Bisson: Heading in the wrong direction.

Mr Carroll: That's right. He also mentioned "in the wrong direction." Coming from southwestern Ontario, he's very familiar with directions. But he did talk about "too far, too fast," and it's interesting.

The other day we passed a bill on behalf of the member for Sudbury in an afternoon, because we all agreed it was something we needed to do. Now we have a piece of legislation here that we all agree is something we need to do. We introduced it in June and here we are, almost into the month of October, and the opposition still has not let us proceed with this bill. I don't understand how they can say we're going too far, too fast, and then at the same time slow us down from implementing a piece of legislation that they agree is in the best interests of young people and children in our province who are the victims of marriage breakup.

Just as final comment, it is nice to see the member for Windsor-Riverside here with us and to understand that he hasn't lost a beat since he was here before.

1550

Mr Bernard Grandmaître (Ottawa East): I would like to congratulate the member on his speech and also congratulate him for coming back to visit us, once in a while anyway, even if it's only every four or five years.

The member talked about the legal aid system, and I thought it was very appropriate that he talked about the lack of service and the cutbacks in legal aid, especially in family law, for the simple reason that in my own constituency office we get a number of phone calls every day about the family support program, and it's not working.

As my colleague from Windsor-Sandwich pointed out, I think it's totally wrong for a government to introduce a new program when no alternative services are in place. I thought she was absolutely right to point out to the government that we need changes to some programs, but to make sure that alternative services are in place.

The present minister went on to say with great fanfare that he was going to change the system, that former governments, including ours, were incompetent, yet he made a mess of the present system. Now he's blaming families, he's blaming couples and he's also blaming children for the mess he has created. I think it's about time that this minister and this ministry take their own responsibility and put in place a system that will work.

Mr Bisson: I want to congratulate my colleague Mr Lessard from Windsor-Riverside for what I think was a bang-on speech in regard to where we find ourselves today when it comes to the family support plan. This bill, Bill 128, deals with the particular aspect about how courts are able to assess what support payments should be paid when people are being separated. The member is making the point that once the court makes that order, it is then the responsibility of the family support plan to make sure that the money comes from the payor to the payee.

Ever since Mr Charles Harnick, the Attorney General of this province, made changes to the family support plan and closed the regional offices of what used to be the family support plan, this system has been in a mess. The member talked about what he heard on the campaign trail, which is what we are hearing in our constituency offices all across this province. You're hearing it, the same as I'm hearing it in my riding office, which is, "I am trying to pay support payments to my wife, the money is coming off my paycheque, my employer is deducting the amount of money, but my ex-wife is not getting the money." That's what the payors are telling us. The payees, on the other hand, are saying: "I can't pay my bills. My children are going without food. The rent is not being paid or the hydro or the phone. When I call my husband to find out what happened, I am finding out that the money has been deducted from his cheque."

The problem is, the person in the middle, Charles Harnick, the Attorney General of this province, has messed up the system. We have case after case after case in our constituency offices that we try to deal with through the Attorney General, and he is not able to do anything. We're saying if you're going to enact changes, at least make sure they work so that the people of this province, especially the children, aren't hurt in your zeal for change.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Durham Centre): I listened with interest to the comments of the member for Windsor-Riverside. He is a lawyer, as he mentioned, and as a lawyer he would know how important it is for persons in Ontario with disputes, particularly family disputes, to have access to efficient, inexpensive dispute resolution. This is even more so when children are involved, and children are involved in the vast majority of these unfortunate marriage breakup situations.

I urge him to encourage the other members opposite to deal with this bill expeditiously. This is the third time this bill has been debated on second reading in this place. This bill is designed to give some degree of guidance and some degree of certainty to families, to husbands and wives and children, in situations where there is a marital dispute in the province.

The federal Divorce Act has its guidelines, but of course it only deals with divorce. There are many separated couples in Ontario. There are many common-law couples in Ontario who break up. These people and their children certainly are entitled to expeditious passage of this important piece of legislation so they will have the same rights as those persons who go through divorce proceedings in Ontario governed by federal legislation.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Is the Attorney General going to —

The Acting Speaker: Member for Kingston and The Islands, come to order.

Mr Flaherty: I urge the member opposite to speak to his colleagues and encourage them to deal promptly with this piece of legislation. In fact, by 1996, a year ago, every one of the American states had already dealt with mandatory support guidelines for children of divorced and separated couples.

Mr Bisson: You stop whining like everybody else. You are the government.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Members for Cochrane South and Kingston and The Islands.

Mr Flaherty: This is an important matter. It's serious for all of the children in the province who are children of broken families, and I encourage all members to speedily pass this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Windsor-Riverside.

Mr Lessard: I'm glad to see there were so many people who were listening with interest to my remarks.

To the member for Chatham-Kent, who made some comment about my saying that the government was moving too far, too fast and in the wrong direction, why is it that we can't get speedy passage of this bill if that's the case? I wonder that myself. It seems as though this government is not able to manage their agenda. That's probably the best reason that this legislation isn't through right now.

They don't seem to have any problem when it comes to ramming through Bill 136, which is going to adversely affect the rights of working people here in Ontario. They didn't have any problem with that. They didn't have any problem with speedily moving through Bill 99, which is going to adversely affect injured workers and make changes to the workers' compensation system in Ontario. They didn't have any problem in getting that through really fast. They didn't have any problem in closing those regional offices for the family support plan as well. That was done pretty quickly.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Durham Centre, come to order.

Mr Lessard: Why is the government not able to put through this legislation that is so important for women and children in getting their support in this province? I think the members in the government need to ask themselves why it's taking so long and not blame the opposition members for the delay in this legislation.

I just want to say to the member for Ottawa East that I'm not here just for a visit. I hope I'm going to be here for the long term.

I also want to indicate that the important issue here is really the implementation. This legislation will pass. We support it, but it needs to be implemented, and the people who deserve the support need to get it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Carroll: I rise to —

Mr Gerretsen: Don't do it.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Kingston and The Islands, come to order.

1600

Mr Carroll: It's interesting to be part of such a controversial piece of legislation.

I rise today in support of the Uniform Federal and Provincial Child Support Guidelines Act, just in case people had forgotten the name of it. Harmonizing the Family Law Act with the federal guidelines will provide one approach for calculating child support for all Ontarians. These guidelines will apply regardless of whether the child support is sought under federal or provincial law.

Throughout this debate members from both opposition parties have registered their support for this bill. We heard that again today. They have applauded the bill's goal of replacing the current practice of determining child support on a case-by-case basis with the more consistent and predictable approach that these guidelines will bring.

We have also heard acknowledgements that Bill 128 will mean a faster, easier and less expensive way for many parents to calculate the amount of support available to their children. Despite this show of support, some opposition members have accused the government of dragging its feet on this bill. I'd like to remind those opposite, especially the member for Windsor-Riverside, who's just newly arrived, that we were ready to proceed with this legislation in June, after the federal guidelines were finalized. It was the opposition members who delayed second reading of this bill.

There are indications now that even though the parties opposite support the bill, they want to refer it to committee for hearings. There's absolutely nothing to be gained but only valuable time to be lost by further reviewing this bill. The purpose of the bill is to bring Ontario in line with federal guidelines which were fully scrutinized and debated at the federal level. Those guidelines were the result of six years of extensive research and consultation by the federal government. They consulted with lawyers, judges, advocacy groups and parents all across Canada. Together they determined that those guidelines provided the best results for the children. Those are the same guidelines that we propose to incorporate into Ontario's Family Law Act.

In October 1996, a House of Commons standing committee met for four days and heard from 14 witnesses. All but three of those witnesses then appeared before the much-publicized Senate hearings in December 1996 and January 1997. The Senate held six days of hearings and listened to 28 witnesses, who represented the broadest possible spectrum of interest, many of whom were from Ontario. They included Phil Epstein, a Toronto family law specialist; the Canadian Bar Association; the Canadian Council for Co-parenting; an organization called SCOPE involved in family support; Fathers Are Capable Too, an organization with the acronym FACT; the National Association of Women and the Law; REAL Women; the Ontario Catholic Women's League; Nicholas Bala, professor of family law at Queen's University; and Ross Finnie, an economist and professor at Carleton.

These witnesses raised every conceivable issue, from the level of awards to sex bias, custody and access, support for post-secondary students, and complaints that the enforcement provisions were too strong. The federal government undertook as a result of these hearings to review custody and access issues, and we fully endorse that review.

As a result of these hearings, a number of amendments and adjustments were made in the federal child support guideline proposals and they are reflected in Ontario's proposed legislation. As other provinces have proceeded to enact their harmonized child support guidelines, they too have relied on the federal hearings as their major

source of public input. Only one province, Manitoba, chose to have public hearings, and only one witness applied to be heard at the hearings.

The federal guidelines have been extensively researched and thoroughly debated to ensure that they benefit children. Legal experts and community organizations have told us that bringing Ontario's Family Law Act into line with the federal guidelines is the right thing to do. In this way, all Ontario child support cases will be treated the same way.

At the same time, there appears to be consensus in this place that Bill 128 puts children first and that it is a bill well worth passing. What then, I ask, is the purpose of delaying this bill by more debate in this House or by holding public hearings? It is in the best interests of children and parents involved in child support cases to proceed with this bill as soon as possible.

We urge all members to expedite the passage of Bill 128 so that all affected people in Ontario can benefit from the predictability and consistency that Bill 128 will bring to the calculation of child support in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Questions or comments?

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): We've heard over and over again that Bill 128 is going to have to deal with the fact that many of us from throughout the province deal with on a daily basis, and that's the fact that support payments aren't getting through to the people who most need them. We've heard member after member in this House for the past year or so talk about this, talk to Mr Harnick about the problems. I too have had a great number of these problems come to my office on a regular basis since they closed the regional office in Thunder Bay. That was the reason. The reason was that it became a mess after that.

I don't know how many times we have to tell the Attorney General about the problems, but when we bring the cases to him and we talk about a lady who is going to lose her home because she is not receiving the payments, we've tried many times to help out. It's a quagmire out there and we keep bringing this to the attention of the Attorney General and getting nowhere

At one point, I was telling him in a question to him about a company in my riding which has been there for many years, a well-established, well-developed company. They too are being tarnished because they were told that the payments were not being made through the proper channels in order that the recipient could get the payments. We got back into the quagmire that was formed by moving the regional office out of the area, out of Thunder Bay, not only creating hardship for the recipient but creating hardship for the company, which was doing everything by the law and submitting the payments. But again, it was just a problem created through the Attorney General's office. I wish the members opposite would hear this and speak to the person who is responsible, the Attorney General.

Mr Len Wood: I listened very attentively to the member for Chatham-Kent, concerned that the opposition parties were holding up Bill 128, the child support guidelines. Most of the comments he made during the seven or eight minutes that he was talking were concern that Bill 128 should pass through without any public hearings and that it should go to third reading and become law. Even if it does, even if that process were to be followed, as long as we have an Attorney General who is so incompetent that in January, when he closed down all the regional offices, put everything into trucks and left the boxes lying all over the place, not secure or anything at all — as long as we have this situation that hasn't been rectified yet — it happened in January when they closed down the regional offices and laid off all the staff, and the women and children in most cases are not getting the money that is being taken off the paycheques. We don't know where it is. It must be piled up in one of the offices that the Attorney General is responsible for.

So for the member for Chatham-Kent to say that the opposition parties are holding this legislation up, there's no fact to that charge at all. We were back in January in an emergency winter sitting of the Legislature to deal with whatever agenda the Conservative government wanted to bring forward. Then they called an emergency summer sitting of the Legislature. We came back on August 18 to deal with whatever the government felt was a priority to get passed into legislation. Now they're saying it's the opposition parties that are not cooperating to bring this legislation through.

How incompetent can a government be that they have to bring back the Legislature in two emergency sessions inside of nine months to try to get their agenda through? Their priorities are all over the place. They don't have any priorities.

1610

Mr Parker: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the remarks by my colleague the member for Chatham-Kent. I would like to remind my friends opposite that the member for Chatham-Kent was speaking on the subject of Bill 128 and not on the subject of the Family Responsibility Office. If he was speaking on the subject of the Family Responsibility Office, he might have spoken at some great length about the absolute mess that the so-called family support plan was in when this government took office and the unforgivable backlog that was left to this government to clean up, with boxes upon boxes of files left untouched in the regional offices and all of the phone calls that went unanswered as the office was inadequate to meet the needs that were out there, and about the heroic efforts this government is putting forward to get through that backlog and to put the whole plan on a more stable and sustainable footing under the Family Responsibility Office and the much better service that the people of this province are receiving from the Family Responsibility Office under this government than they ever received under the family support plan under the previous government.

But that is not what this debate is about, of course. This debate is about Bill 128, which is about uniform child support guidelines; it's about bringing the Ontario legislation into conformity with the federal legislation. As my friend from Durham mentioned earlier, the federal legisla-

tion is restricted to Divorce Act settlements, those cases that are resolved under the federal Divorce Act and administered under the federal legislation. In Ontario, we have the Family Law Act, which applies where the Divorce Act is not brought in. This provision here will bring the family support act in Ontario into line with the federal legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Chatham-Kent, you have two minutes.

Mr Carroll: I appreciate the interest shown by the member for Kenora, the member for Cochrane North and my colleague the member for York East. It's interesting that my colleague from York East seemed to be the only one who was paying attention to anything I said, because he's the only one who made any comment on what I said.

The member for Cochrane North talked about our government calling the Legislature back for special sessions so we could advance our agenda. I guess we're making up for the year 1994-95, the last year of the former government, when the Legislature sat vacant for probably 11 of the 12 months of the year. I think those people who work in this place like to see it busy and like to see that we are advancing our agenda, because the people of Ontario need us to do that.

Bill 128 is one small example of some legislation that should have passed through here very simply, that should have been accepted by all party members and should have become law long before now, because it is in the best interests of the young people in our province and some of those single parents who are having trouble with child support issues. That should have happened a long time ago. Unfortunately, because of the way we do things in this place, it didn't happen, and that's sad, because nobody wins in that particular environment; everybody turns out to be losers.

I would hope that today sees the end of the debate on this bill, that we get it done, that we get it enacted, so that the people in the province who need the assistance this bill will provide, namely, young people and single parents or parents who are owed support from their former spouse, can get on with their lives, lead productive lives. That's all we're trying to do. I would hope the opposition members support us in that cause.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): First of all, I want to begin by welcoming my colleague from Windsor, Mr Lessard. I can tell members in the House he's an able and competent campaigner and speaks passionately on the issues he believes in and is worthy of listening to on issues, though we don't agree.

I would like to begin by saying that I personally will be voting in favour of this bill. I think it's a step in the right direction, and I think we need to be speaking about some fundamentals and some things this bill represents, because government members opposite have tried to suggest to us that we're not talking on topic when we speak about things like going too far, too fast. This issue is a great example of what happens when a government does something without considering the consequences. You were able to shut down the family support plan offices a lot faster than you're able to pass this bill, and what did you do? You created chaos.

I've raised issue after issue in this House. Isn't it amazing when you get a case — one case happened in January. A woman died waiting for her support payment. When you raise it in the House, presto, you get a call from the Family Responsibility Office five minutes after you've stood up. But God help you if you're a woman in Windsor with cancer waiting for a family support plan payment.

So when you talk to me about dealing with this bill quickly, great. How is it you could close those offices so fast? Let me tell you, you created a mess. You know it, every one of you. You've had the same calls we have. You didn't think through the consequences. You didn't think for a minute, did you, that if you close six offices and lay off staff, lay off lawyers, lay off advocates, and don't even have another replacement office open, there are going to be problems?

I know many of the government members are small business people, and they know how to run an efficient operation; they're customer-service oriented. Let's remember who the customers are in this case. It's single mothers with children, who wait for those cheques to be deposited in their bank.

Yes, there was a mess when you came to office. There is no question about that. There is no question that we had to do better. There's no question that in this Legislature we had to be debating all kinds of options. The problem is that you moved and closed those offices without thinking through the consequences. Lo and behold, a year later you bring in another bill. So what do we have? We have a government that starts by closing an important office that serves people in their home communities and serves them in a relatively efficient manner, and you started a mess.

I will tell you the experience in my constituency office. Members may or may not have the same experiences. I am seeing now that cases when we call are being dealt with more quickly than they were before. There's no question. Instead of taking three weeks, it's now taking 10 days. But the fact remains that the situation should never have occurred. Had you taken a reasonable, moderate, balanced approach to this issue, looked at the backlog on the one hand, looked at alternatives for service delivery, looked at the timing of change, and coordinated that with initiatives like this, my friends, you would not have done the irreparable harm that you have done to tens of thousands of our poorest and most vulnerable fellow citizens.

So I say to the members opposite, too far, too fast is precisely what we should be talking about, because this issue is in and of itself an example of what goes wrong when you come in with an ideological agenda, without thinking of the facts, and the government doesn't let the facts get in the way of a good story too often.

1620

I was pleased to hear the member for Chatham support the federal government on what they've done and to say that this is something we should be doing. We don't disagree; we're going to vote in favour of this. But the ques-

tion remains: How is it you could close the family support plan offices in a matter of weeks and leave those women and children without a mechanism for collecting their payments, yet you can't get this bill through the House, can't use your majority? It's because it's not important enough to you, just like health care is not important enough to you, just like you can close hospitals in Windsor and not provide for reinvestment prior to those hospitals closing.

Let me tell you, members opposite, the emergency room situation in Windsor is but the tip of the iceberg. The Health Services Restructuring Commission met today to consider a range of investment options, and when they come to your community and they don't do it, you'll get the calls.

On this particular bill, we know that this bill is going in the right direction, but the horror stories continue. Yes, the response is going quicker. It's not 10 days; it's seven days, six days, five days. But we say to the government that when you make change of this magnitude, it affects people, whether it be in health care, whether it be in education, whether it be in family support plan offices.

When you move to address the problems — and you as a government are faced with significant problems, no question, and you inherited a bad situation in this case, no question — we urge you to think things through, do things carefully, be balanced, review the options so you're not left with the kind of situation we were all confronted with when you closed the regional family support plan offices.

We believe, by the way, that those offices should stay open. We believe that people are better served in their own community. We believe, based on the hundreds of phone calls and meetings we've been a part of, that they are the right way to go. We introduced those offices. It was a Liberal government that brought that plan into being in this province.

I am convinced more than ever that when governments want to centralize bureaucracy and make it big and deliver services from Toronto instead of in people's home communities, it won't work. This is precisely the example we should be considering when we talk about megacities like Chatham, when we talk about megacities like Toronto. What kind of bureaucracy are we creating, and will it serve the people it's intended to serve or will it be inefficient and leave the most vulnerable behind?

I applaud the government on this bill. I will be casting my vote in favour. It is a step in the right direction. It makes good sense, not just common sense. It strikes me as being an important element in the delivery of support to families and children who need it. I urge the government in your deliberations, be it on this issue or any other — there were individuals who went weeks and months without support payments simply because they were tied up in an unfunctioning bureaucracy. Was that cost to them associated with your attempted cleanup really worth it? Had we taken a few more months, discussed alternatives, looked at options — that may not suit you, but I tell you, it would suit the people of this province. As we change, as we adjust to the realities of the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, we have an obligation to move with prudence, with due consideration to the impact our decisions and legislation have on the lives of people, even if it's something like this that I think it would be pretty hard to disagree with. Do things right the first time and save the heartache that you created with the family support plan offices.

Mr Miclash: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I do not believe we have a quorum in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you please check if we have a quorum?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the Member for Dovercourt — Riverdale.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): How can you forget, Speaker, now that my riding has a soap opera named after it?

I'm happy to be able to speak for a couple of minutes in response to the comments by the member for Windsor-Walkerville. The member for Windsor-Walkerville gets to the heart of the issue here. Although the members from the Tory party stand up and complain — I know they'll do it continually — that all the opposition is doing is talking about issues other than this particular bill, I have to say they are connected. The member for Windsor-Walkerville talked about why. Whether you like it or not, you're going to keep hearing us talk about the mess at the family support plan.

I would say in response to the member for Windsor-Walkerville, who said that indeed you inherited a mess, I guess all new governments like to blame previous governments for any so-called mess they inherit, and they continue to do it on and on. There's only so long you can do that, and you're past that point.

I have to give credit: I believe it was under the Liberal-NDP accord, and I know Ian Scott was the first Attorney General to start this program. We've always said there were problems with it. It was underresourced. There were problems when we were the government, no doubt about it. There were certainly problems when the Liberals first brought it in as a new program. We improved on it. God knows, it needed more improvements. We have never denied that.

But your government took it and pulled it apart. When the members over there stand up and say they inherited this awful mess and there were boxes covered in dust, you are not fooling the people out there. The women and children who used to get their payments under our government and under the Liberal government stopped getting their payments. That is the reality.

Mr Carroll: I need to comment on my colleague from Windsor-Walkerville's expression of my support for the federal government. I cannot let that go totally unchallenged. In this particular initiative, I do support the federal government, as I think we should when one of our co-governments does something right. It doesn't happen that

often at the federal level, but in this particular case it happened and I think it's okay to support that. I would of course expect that the member for Windsor-Walkerville would see the opportune time to support this provincial government when and if he agrees with anything we do.

I had given most of the blame for the family support plan situation that exists in the province to our friends in the third party. It's nice for the official opposition to acknowledge that they started the mess. The member for Windsor-Walkerville would like to continue the mess. He said, "We think the offices should stay open." What he's saying is the status quo, which hasn't worked for the last 10 years, should be maintained.

The members in the third party say: "Yes, we agree with that. We tried to improve the mess that the Liberals gave us. We didn't get it fixed properly, but you guys are trying to change it." I think 10 or 12 years of trying to make a program work and spending millions and millions of dollars on it and having a situation where there are thousands of calls every day that go unanswered, millions of dollars of money that doesn't get from the person who pays it to the person who should receive it — I think 10 years is long enough to give it a trial, and it's okay to change it. That's what we're attempting to do.

Bill 128 doesn't specifically do that, but I am pleased that the member for Windsor-Walkerville has stood in his place today and given our government support on that bill. We appreciate that.

1630

Mr Miclash: As the member for Windsor-Walkerville has indicated, this is a bill that we certainly can support. The member for Chatham-Kent was just talking a little bit about where the plan began. I have to say to him that I was here when the plan began under the Attorney General. It was a plan that was working fairly well, and it was a plan that was improved upon by the third party as they moved forward, but then we had an Attorney General come in and mess up the entire program. It is a mess today. This is a thing that you're hearing in your office, I'm hearing in my office, all the members from around Ontario are hearing in their offices. It's a plan that your Attorney General has messed up. When are you going to get that through to your Attorney General?

The member has indicated, yes, we'll support Bill 128, but we'll also support any plans or any help we can give the Attorney General in ensuring that our constituents aren't being put behind the eight-ball when it comes to their support payments, to ensure that our companies aren't being given a bad reputation when they find out that the support payment is not getting through the channels because the regional offices have been closed. We've been saying that day after day after day.

This is a plan that was brought into place to fix a situation. Here we have a situation which has grown worse and more out of proportion than this Attorney General would have ever thought. The closing of the regional offices has created a mess. We've said that a million times if we've said it once. We have to get that through to the Attorney General on behalf of the single parents out there who are not receiving their support payments, on behalf of the children who are being affected because they're not receiving the support payments they deserve.

To the member for Chatham-Kent, this is the problem. Yes, we do support Bill 128 and we do support cleaning up this mess.

Mr Lessard: I want to thank the member for Windsor-Walkerville, especially his remarks at the outset, when he talked about my capabilities and qualifications. I only wonder why he wasn't saying things like that in 1995. I wish I could use it in my next campaign brochure. Maybe I will.

One of the things he did say that I disagree with is that this government started with a mess when it came to the family support plan in 1995. I disagree with that. There may be differences of opinion with respect to that. We know it wasn't perfect, that there was some room for improvement.

I think the member for Windsor-Walkerville and everybody will agree that one of the things you don't do is just make a mess, if that's what you think it is, even worse. What have they done? They say they had a mess. They appointed the current Attorney General as the person who is Mr Fixit and the person who is given the lead role in trying to address a mess that they say is there, and look at the results he has had. I think that's evidence in itself.

He made some comments as well about why this legislation hasn't been passed, even though everybody agrees that it should. He indicated his support for the legislation as well. But he really addressed the priorities of this government. When it comes to closing the regional offices, they didn't have any problem in doing that quickly and expeditiously. When it came to closing hospitals, no problem. When it comes to jamming through legislation like Bill 136 or Bill 99, there are no problems with that.

Why is it that they have a problem with getting this legislation through? It really is their priorities. They're not focused on the concerns of women and children. That's the only reason. That's the reason that the enforcement mechanisms they introduced almost a year ago haven't collected one single penny of support for people who deserve it.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Windsor-Walkerville.

Mr Duncan: Thanks to the members who responded. I listened with interest to the member for Chatham-Kent. I was reminded of Kipling's words about "words you've spoken with truth twisted by knaves that make a trap for fools." I support your bill. You said to me, "Why don't you sometimes?" The very first thing I said was, "I support your bill." It's a step in the right direction, there's no question. But I urge the government members again, when you make change, particularly of the magnitude that you are contemplating, be it in this, be it in health care or be it in education, you would be wise to move carefully and cautiously.

It was not a complete mess, with all due respect to the member for Chatham-Kent. It worked rather well, and it worked to serve people. Do you throw the baby out with

the bath water? No, not at all. The $100 million in uncollected payments, certainly you have to deal with that; certainly you do. But you don't do it by ripping the guts out of a program before you have something in place to replace it, especially when you're dealing with the lives of children and women who rely on those payments.

I would suggest to the members opposite that this family support plan that you dealt with early on should be indicative of what can happen to you when you move without thought, when you do things for the wrong reason. If you want change, have reason to make consultation, involve people and move process along, be careful —

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired. Further debate?

Mr Lessard: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I've already participated in the debate, but for the benefit of the next speaker I believe we should have a quorum.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you please check if we have a quorum.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Riverdale.

Ms Churley: I will say at the outset that because of the new draconian rules to shut down the opposition down, I only have 10 minutes to speak to this important bill. I'm sure, Speaker, you can relate to this. I am one of the Deputy Speakers, as are you, and we don't get to speak as often as we might like on some of these important bills.

I'm not complaining; it's just a fact. I love my job and appreciate doing it, and appreciate having the opportunity. But I don't get as many opportunities as I would like sometimes to speak on bills. I certainly resent the fact that now, because of those rule changes to shut the opposition down and speed things up as much as possible, I only get 10 minutes to speak on this bill today.

Interjections.

Ms Churley: I think it's important to remind people, as the opposition say, "Oh, you've just wasted a minute talking about this," that that is what the government has done. They have shut down the opposition, and that includes the people out there, to the largest extent that they have been able to do.

1640

I've heard time and time again today in great outrageous tones: "It's the opposition who held this bill up. This is an important bill. You all say you support it. Why are you holding it up?" Let me remind the government members, in case they're not clear on how this place works yet, it's the House leader, I suppose in consultation with the Premier and some other members, who decides what comes before this House. I'll remind the members there are three readings. At first reading there is no debate, on second reading there is debate, sometimes committee hearings. Obviously on a bill like this that we all support, there aren't committee hearings. Then, after a vote on that, we go into third reading, more debate, and then there's royal assent.

The opposition should be given the opportunity, and should not be berated for choosing to want, to debate an important bill. I want to remind the members that it's up to them when they call bills. They have been able to ram through all kinds of other bills one, two, three, bringing in closure, bringing in time allocation. Bill 136, for instance, is one they really wanted to ram through. They tried to do it with Bill 26. It didn't work because we held them up. But this is par for the course with this government.

I would say to the people who are listening to this nonsense that this opposition is holding up such an important bill that it's they who have been holding up the bill. If they think it's so important, it should have been on their priority list. Why have there been so many days and so many gaps in calling the reading? I think that's a disgrace and I don't think we should hear any more about that nonsense, because clearly, as always, this government, these members try to place the blame on the opposition or commissions or arm's-length bodies. They refuse to take responsibility for their own actions. This bill could have been passed a long time ago and it's their own fault that it hasn't been.

I want to talk briefly about the importance of this bill. My colleague from London Centre gave very good opening remarks on this bill on behalf of our caucus and went into a great deal of detail about the implications of it. It's a very important bill and it should be passed quickly. The government should have brought it through the House a lot more quickly than they did. I'm not going to go into the details. I believe that people have done that. It's actually pretty straightforward and important that it be done, and I congratulate the government on moving forward with it. But you're not going to shut down this caucus —

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): On a point of order, Speaker: My apologies to the member, but there isn't a quorum again. Why can't the Tories keep a quorum here? They've got so many members.

The Deputy Speaker: Could you please check.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Riverdale.

Ms Churley: You're not going to shut down this caucus from talking about the problems at the family support plan until they are fixed. As I said earlier, and all the members from my caucus have always said, there were problems with the plan. There were problems when the Liberals brought it in. There were problems when we took it over. It was underresourced. It needed more resources. That's the point we're trying to make here. What did this government do? What did the Attorney General, Charles Harnick, do when he took over? Instead of looking at it and thinking, "This plan needs more resources," he tore it apart. He had to find money for the tax cut. He took money out of it. He closed eight regional offices and fired over 100 — I forget the number now — experienced

workers. The plan was left a mess. There's no doubt about it.

They opened up a regional office. It was full of unopened boxes, computers not plugged in. That is the reality. No matter how much the government members yell and scream and say, "It's all the Liberals' fault, it's all the NDP's fault, it's not our fault," that is not the case. Charles Harnick took it over and made it far worse.

I'm going to tell you why we will not shut up about it until it's fixed. We know for a fact — we have the evidence, and the Attorney General and the members in this room have the evidence too — that women and children who were getting their payments on time under our government — I'm talking in numbers of thousands — stopped getting their cheques on time.

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): That's not true.

Mr Parker: Not true.

Ms Churley: I hear members over there say that's not true. I can assure you, Speaker, that I do not tell a lie. It is the truth and we have all kinds of evidence of that. The members know it, which is why they're so defensive on this issue. Surely they're getting the same calls in their offices, the same letters. We have the evidence that the women and children who were getting their money before, under our government, under the Liberal government, stopped getting their money. That is a fact. So the member for York East can get up and self-righteously talk about the boxes covered in dust and all of these things and the terrible mess they inherited; it is not the case.

They had a level of problems and they needed to work from that base to start fixing, which is what our government was doing, but they didn't say: "Let's take a long look at where the problems are. Let's look at what the NDP were doing with this, where they were going. Let's talk to people and figure out what to do." What did the Attorney General do but just rip it all apart and talk to no one, because he had to save money for the tax cut? The irony is that it is in such a mess that it's quite likely he's going to have to put in more money than he took out, and the tragedy is that a lot of it will have to go towards fixing up the mess that was created.

The reason we will bring this up repeatedly, over and over again, is that, I may remind all members of the House, when we stand up here and point fingers at each other, "It's your fault," "It's your fault," "It's your fault," let's remember that there are women and children out here who were affected by this in a negative way. I got letters and phone calls. I met with women who were going for months and months. They couldn't pay their bills. Some of them lost of their houses or were kicked out of their apartments. All kinds of awful happened to people, and it still is happening to them.

We must not forget in these discussions, and sometimes we get somewhat abstract when we're talking about these bills in this place —

Mr Lessard: Not you.

Ms Churley: But no, not me. Because I am the critic for our party for women's issues, perhaps I deal more directly with women across the province who have experienced problems since this government took over and since Charles Harnick, the Attorney General, took over the family support plan, maybe more than everybody. Generally you will deal with mostly people in your own riding; I have been dealing with women and kids across the province since this government took over the family plan. It is heartaching at times when you hear what these people went through.

Let us all bear in mind that we have got a problem here, and the problem was created because an already underresourced situation was made worse. You cannot deny that fact. It is a reality. I want to see the members of this government go to the Attorney General and the Premier and say that you will not tolerate this government, your own government, ripping money out of the pockets of kids and their mothers — this is not even taxpayers' money; it's money legitimately coming from in most cases their fathers — that you won't tolerate that and you want the problem fixed now.

1650

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Flaherty: I listened to the comments of the member for Riverdale, who is the NDP's women's critic, as I understand it. She complains about draconian rules. She had 10 minutes to speak, of which she spent exactly zero time talking about Bill 128, which deals with child support guidelines in Ontario. For our government, kids come first.

This is an important bill for the support of children in this province. The federal government guidelines are already in place. Many other provinces have already acted on this. This bill was introduced in June of this year. This is the third day of second reading debate on this bill.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Why didn't you call it before?

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Algoma.

Mr Flaherty: She says there's an effort to shut down the opposition. As I say, it's the third day of debate on second reading on this bill. This is a bill that she says she supports. She doesn't talk about the bill in the Legislature. It delays getting the guidelines in place for single mothers, for the children of families that have suffered marital dissolution in the province of Ontario. That's what it means. She wastes 10 minutes of time without even debating the bill that is before the Legislature. She says it's debate on an important bill. Debate means posing different points of view, rational debate.

What is it in Bill 128 that you don't like? If there isn't something in the bill that you don't like, why are you standing up and pretending you're debating the bill? If you support the bill, stand up and say: "We support the bill. We want to move it forward. We care about kids. It's important for the children in the Ontario that they have this sort of certainty, that guidelines are in place for the support of children and single mothers in the province." It's extremely important. I invite you, if you disagree with something in the bill, to say what it is you disagree with. If not, let's get on with it for the sake of the kids in the province.

Mr Miclash: I've just heard something in this House that I didn't think I would ever hear, and that's the member from the government party saying to his party, "Kids come first." I have to ask the member, if kids come first over there, why wasn't this piece of legislation brought in a lot sooner?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Algoma, order.

Mr Miclash: The member for Riverdale, the critic of the third party for women's issues, has illustrated to the members across the way a point that they've heard in their offices, a point that we've heard in our offices. It's kids that are being hurt out there because the Attorney General can't get his act in order.

I spoke earlier about the regional offices. The member for Riverdale spoke about the closing of regional offices. The member for Durham Centre can't seem to get it through to himself that it was the closing of the regional offices that affected the kids, the kids of the single parent who's coming into my office, into his office, saying there are problems with this plan. It's not because of the employer, not because of the spouse, as the member for Riverdale has indicated, often the father. It's because the payments are not getting through following up the closing of the regional offices. I can't say that enough. I'm seeing too many cases, my colleagues are seeing too many cases, the members opposite are seeing too many cases. When are these people going to realize that?

Again, as the member for Riverdale has indicated, we support this piece of legislation. We want to know why it wasn't up here earlier if kids come first for this government. I commend her for her comments and for the research she's done across the province.

Mr Wildman: I listened to the comments of the member for Riverdale in my office on the TV and then I came in to listen to the last portion of her speech because I know how knowledgeable she is with regard to the whole problem of family support in this province.

I think it's very odd to have members opposite arguing that the House leaders for the official opposition and the third party, my friend from St Catharines and myself, somehow are able to hold up legislation in this House. I wish we had that power, frankly. I really wish we had that power, but we don't. The fact is that the government House leader — nobody else — decides when bills are to be called. He is the one who determines whether you deal with it in June or in late September.

Mr Flaherty: Three days of debate.

Mr Wildman: The opposition can determine how many days they want to debate, but whether those three days are in June or in late September is the responsibility of the government House leader and nobody else.

The fact is that we support this legislation. As the member for Riverdale said, we are very concerned, though, that even if this bill passes, the government will not be able to properly implement it because of the mess the Attorney General has made of the family support plan. Ever since the regional offices were closed and all of those staff were laid off, our offices have been inundated by people who can't get their support payments. I've had one staff person working half of her time in my constituency office on this problem and still we have people who haven't had payments from January —

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Time has expired.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): I'm also pleased to respond to the member for Riverdale, whose complaint was with respect to the 10-minute limitation on the time. As the member for Durham Centre has pointed out, I think your time should be spent focusing on the issues within the bill.

For me, it's most important to remind people who may be viewing today that starting October 22, 1997, in 43 different communities throughout the province, this government is going to provide a public forum for people to be informed. Furthermore, we have a child support guideline, a booklet that's available. I think this booklet answers most of the questions that people have who are in the midst of these difficult times in their lives. If they want to call the referral number, 1-800-268-8326, that's a toll-free number.

I would ask for unanimous consent that the member for Durham Centre be given another two minutes to respond to the allegation that we don't care about children. I'm asking for unanimous consent, Mr Speaker, on that issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that the member for Durham Centre have two minutes to explain? No.

Mr O'Toole: Mr Speaker, the member for Durham Centre has very capably focused today. They've refused to give us the time to try and relate to the people who might be viewing today who need to know how to solve the problems when it comes to child support, the family guidelines.

As the member for Durham Centre has said a couple of times, the confusion that's out there — the federal government and other provinces have taken the time to develop the guidelines. The people can find out. Remember to call 1-800-268-8326 or attend one of the open sessions that will start October 22 to explain the details of this important bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Riverdale, two minutes.

Ms Churley: To the members for Durham Centre, Algoma, Durham East and Kenora, thank you very much for your comments.

I want to say to the member for Durham Centre that he just doesn't get it. When you say, "Kids come first," yes, kids come first in Mike Harris's Ontario all right. We have more kids lining up at food banks, living in hostels, going to school hungry. That's the kind of caring this government is showing to kids.

The member for Algoma repeated again some of the things I said, I think even more forcefully, about how it's the government's responsibility, the government's alone, to bring in bills. If you introduce it in June, why wait till the end of September to bring it back? It's your responsibility, so don't give us that.

To the member for Kenora, I'd like to thank you for your remarks. I believe you reiterated again that we're talking about kids and their mothers here. Let's bear that in mind.

To the member for Durham East, it's not enough that the government cuts my time down to 10 minutes, but now he thinks as a government member that he can tell me what I should say in my 10 minutes. No, thank you. I will get up here —

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Sorry, but I'm opposed to a lot of the things you are doing that are directly hurting kids and I will continue repeatedly to speak out about that. When he holds up a booklet, let me say to the member for Durham East that kids can't eat your lousy booklet. They can't eat your 1-800 number. We're talking here and reminding you that the kids need to get the money their fathers or mothers have paid into the plan. So yes, I support this bill; we all support this bill. Get on with it, but the most important thing is to fix that family support plan.

1700

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): I rise to support the Uniform Federal and Provincial Child Support Guidelines Act. What we are asking the Legislature to do here today and in these discussions is to bring Ontario's Family Law Act into line with the federal child support guidelines. By doing so, the same approach to calculating child support will apply regardless of whether a child support order is made under federal or provincial law. By harmonizing the guidelines with the federal guidelines, we will provide for the consistency of approach that legal experts and community organizations have stressed as being so important to avoid confusion and, most important, inequity for families in Ontario.

In second reading debate, members of all parties have recognized the importance of this legislation and have indicated their support for the bill. The bill provides a consistent approach to calculating child support in Ontario. It does so by bringing Ontario's Family Law Act into line with the federal child support guidelines which took effect May 1, 1997. The federal guidelines replace the current case-by-case approach to determining child support in divorce cases.

These guidelines will allow parents and judges to calculate the amount of child support in divorce cases by referring to a support table or grid. This support table sets out the amount of child support based on the payor's income and the number of children entitled to support. At the same time, the guidelines allow for some flexibility to pay more or less than the support table in certain circumstances. This approach will provide many parents with a faster, easier and less expensive way to determine the amount of support their children are entitled to.

The member for London Centre has stressed another benefit of moving from the case-by-case approach to a more predictable method of setting child support levels. Since the guidelines will allow many parents to determine what level of support a child will receive, a judge is likely to order before they get to court —

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: My apologies to the member, but there really should be a quorum here to hear what she has to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Would you check and see if a quorum is present?

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Durham-York.

Mrs Munro: I would just like to continue and certainly recognize the fact that we are now able to establish quorum.

Since the guidelines allow many parents to determine what level of child support a judge is likely to order before they get to court, it's been clearly noted that this will allow us to avoid lengthy and costly court battles that very often ensue.

Throughout this debate, the opposition has raised the need to inform clients about the guidelines and to effectively put in systems to deal with the demand for variations to child support orders. This government has made those preparations. We are already implementing the guidelines. We have been doing that since May 1 in the General Division courts that deal with divorce cases which are covered by the guidelines. We are ready to do the same for cases that fall under the Family Law Act if and when Bill 128 becomes law.

We already have the most comprehensive implementation of any of the provinces. Our initiatives include a toll-free 1-800 public inquiry line, consumer information kits, trained staff in the courts to provide information and a series of public information sessions on the guidelines to be held in 43 communities, starting October 22. These sessions will be held in cities across the province in conjunction with local lawyers who have been trained by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

We are pleased with the support and enthusiasm we have received from lawyers throughout Ontario. The member for London Centre has already commended this government for its educational initiatives for the public and for the court system. With regard to variations, public education is a key strategy to manage the increase in caseload that may result from these guidelines.

First, by informing the public and encouraging them to review the guidelines, it is hoped the parties may be able to reach consent agreements before they get to court. This will cut down court time and costs. Federal publications have explained how their guidelines work and Ontario's public education sessions will greatly assist this goal.

Second, our family court staff have been trained in the use of the guidelines and can assist people in filing their applications. Additional training of court staff is planned for this fall.

Third, the courts are already closely monitoring activity related to the guidelines and are prepared to deal with

increased demand. Negotiations are under way with the federal government to secure necessary funding. We are already implementing the federal guidelines, but until this bill becomes law, we cannot implement them for all the children in Ontario. This is because so many parents with child support orders, such as those who are separated or were never married, fall under the Family Law Act. Not passing Bill 128 only serves to perpetuate the confusion that two different approaches under two different sets of laws pose for the public.

The member for London Centre stated that this is a bill that both oppositions have clearly indicated they are prepared to support. This support has been voiced by the members for Downsview, Parkdale, Fort York, Welland-Thorold and Scarborough-Agincourt. We urge the members to take action now to expedite passage of Bill 128, a bill that puts children first and that treats all Ontario families the same.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Miclash: I would like to congratulate the member for Durham-York on her comments and her contribution to the debate this afternoon.

The member for Durham-York indicated there are parents out there with support orders, and I must remind the member that's something we've been saying for the last 18 months. Yes, there are parents out there with child support orders. The unfortunate thing about it is that they are no good to those parents when the child support order cannot be followed through upon and when the payments don't flow.

You indicated, much as did a member earlier on, your colleague who sits in the front of you, that children come first. I don't think this government has proven that to anyone. I don't think there's anyone out there believing that, especially the members in this House who hear on a regular basis — you've heard from all of us, the Premier has heard from us on a regular basis — that it's just not happening.

We talked about the regional offices earlier on, about how they were instrumental in ensuring that yes, children came first. Why would you close the regional offices down and create chaos if your party truly believed in the fact that children come first? Why would we be hearing from all those parents who cannot provide for their children? Why would we be hearing from those companies that are saying, "We're doing our thing, we're putting forth the payments, we're ensuring that we follow the rules and regulations"?

It's the government that is blocking the payments. They are not getting through to the actual people who need them: the children. As many times as you can indicate that your government believes children come first, I will stand up and tell you that according to my office and the people coming through to my office, it's not getting to where it's supposed to be: to the children.

Mr Kormos: I appreciate the comments of the member for Durham-York. As they stand alone they are, I suppose, somewhat irrefutable. She spoke about the need for this legislation and we quite frankly agree, which is why we have questioned why the government House leader allowed it to linger so long before finally calling it for debate here in the House. The fact is that the government House leader has put other matters ahead of this, has put this low on the scale in terms of this government's priorities. We understand that even today the government House leader wanted to debate his cottagers bill, somehow placing cottagers higher on the scale of preference than kids. I have some problems with this government talking a big game about their commitment to kids and moms.

Here's the government that pulled, stole $12 million, well, $11.5 million, to be more precise, out of funding for children's aid societies across the province at a time when the demand for services from children's aid is escalating. We know that the increased demand was concurrent with the attack on single moms and the poorest families when this government slashed social assistance benefits to the poorest people in our province by just shy of 22%. How do they respond? They cut back on $11.5 million worth of funding to children's aid societies as demand escalates.

I tell you, this is a government that has abandoned kids, abandoned poor people, abandoned single moms, abandoned the sick, abandoned the unemployed, and it does it all in the name of a tax break, two thirds of which is going to go to the top 10% of income earners. They are telling kids in this province to pay for that tax break for the rich. Shame.

Mr Parker: I want to say what a pleasure it was to listen to the remarks of my colleague from Durham-York, who seems to be the only speaker since the member for Durham Centre who has a grasp of the subject matter of the bill we are here to debate today.

We've heard a lot of complaints about the time available to comment on this bill, but as opposition members get up and speak, they talk about everything but this bill. The member for Durham-York did a very good job of summarizing the content and impact and essential nature of the bill and she was able to do that in less than the 10 minutes available to her to speak to this House.

The opposition has insisted on three days of debate on this bill. I would understand the need for extensive debate on this bill if the opposition had something useful to say about it, but when the opposition gets their opportunity to stand and speak in this debate, they don't talk about this bill at all; they talk about virtually everything else. But the member for Durham-York was able to summarize the entire bill and explain what it's about in less than the 10 minutes that was available to her to speak.

I know that if she had wanted to speak at greater length, she might have quoted from Phil Epstein, one of the leading matrimonial lawyers in Toronto, one of the leading matrimonial lawyers across the country, who says:

"This is a progressive step by the Ontario government and will undoubtedly provide a better and more effective method of determining child support. The adoption of the guidelines will lower legal costs for parents, speed up the resolution of family disputes and create predictability and certainty. Above all, they will ensure more consistent

treatment to support-paying parents and yet provide sufficient flexibility to ensure awards are fair and relate to individual family circumstances."

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I too welcome the opportunity to comment on those remarks made by the member for Durham-York. I think the member very well articulated the points of this bill as they compare to federal guidelines and I want to compliment her on her comments.

It's interesting to note, though, that when the member for York East pointed out that the member for Durham-York was able to do it in less than the 10 minutes allowed, it took most of his two minutes to go on, not on what the member for Durham-York was saying but on what members throughout the Legislature have been saying today. I guess it depends on which side of the House you're sitting on as to who you should criticize. I'm surprised that he too didn't get up and take his full two minutes to speak directly to this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Durham-York has two minutes to respond.

Mrs Munro: I certainly appreciate the comments that have come from the members for Kenora, Welland-Thorold, York East and Essex South.

Throughout the debate this afternoon there has been reference made to the question of clouding the issue, the fact that we are looking at Bill 128 and yet it seems to engender a great deal of response in regard to other issues by members of the opposition. It became clear as well in those comments that were made by the members. I think, however, that perhaps one of the things that can be drawn from the comments that have been made is the fact that there is a very clear sense of support for this bill, and therefore the only things that can be said are to take issue with other areas.

The question the member for Kenora raises on the issue of child support needs to be examined, certainly on the basis of the record of this government in making those changes that were clearly necessary. By increasing the staff from 90 to 139, by reducing the amount of time, we have very clearly recognized a problem and have addressed that.

On the issue of the support that members of the community have seen fit to provide for this bill, I think it speaks directly to the need for continued cooperation in providing those services that best meet the needs of children. That, quite frankly, is what we are doing in this as in other pieces of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Crozier: I welcome the opportunity to make some comments on the Uniform Federal and Provincial Child Support Guidelines Act, 1997, Bill 128. I want to say to you, Speaker, and to the members assembled today that what we are talking about is in fact all about kids. In this bill we talk about parents agreeing, we talk about courts, we talk about agencies, but the result of all of it is what we think and how are we reacting towards the future of our kids, and well we should.

I think children are our most important asset. If the government really believes that kids come first, I would recommend to them that they have a minister who is responsible for children, who is responsible for youth, because we all know that children, as they're referred to in this context, are too young to vote. They have no voice. Children can't come before our committees, even one that might discuss a bill similar to this. Therefore, they have no voice. When social services are either enhanced or withdraw, but particularly when they're withdrawn, kids have no voice. When social services are restricted — and I think of a young lady in my riding by the name of Kimberly. When home care is restricted because the government just says there isn't enough money — they don't deny that she has the need, but there isn't enough money — she's affected, but she has no voice.

1720

I'm glad and pleased that the goals of this piece of legislation are commendable. They are goals we can support. In the few minutes I have left, part of what I say will be directly to Bill 128. I'll warn you ahead of time that part of what I have to say, although it isn't in Bill 128, certainly flows from Bill 128 and I think therefore can be connected to it and is worth mentioning at this time.

We realize that it's going to provide uniformity with the Divorce Act of Canada and the Family Law Act of Ontario. It should allow for flexibility, and this bill does, so that courts can use the guidelines and alter the circumstances a bit from what the guidelines might say, dependent upon the exceptional circumstances the court may see.

I've listened to the debate here in the House and I've watched a bit of it on television back in my office. In spite of the criticism the government members make of the references to other acts that flow from the results of this act, those references should be taken in the context in which they're given, and that is, as I said at the outset, that we're all concerned about children.

I haven't been in this Legislature much longer than the majority of the government members, but I can recall when Mike Harris, Ernie Eves, Jim Wilson, Runciman and Harnick were all over on this side of the Legislature. You might find this hard to believe, but I can recall debates when they didn't speak totally about the bill that was before them. Perhaps I'm just taking a lesson from Mike Harris when he sat over on this side. I can remember when he spoke to a bill that had nothing to do with rivers and streams, but Mike Harris tied this Legislature up for hours on end by reading the name of every lake, river and stream in the province. Speaker, I know you at least will be tolerant. I find it hard to believe that members across in the government have not had the same concerns, the same frustration that we've had with the fact that the family support plan offices were closed.

I was elected in December 1993, so I spent about 18 months here before the election in 1995. I can honestly say that the amount of time my constituency office had to deal with family support matters was rather limited. I can honestly say, and prove it by the record of calls, the record of contacts, the records of calls we make from our office,

that the amount of time we've had to spend since these family support plan offices have been closed has dramatically increased. There may have been a backlog before. There may have been a backlog back in the mid-1980s relative to the number of cases that were in front of us, but it certainly increased dramatically when these family support plan offices were closed.

It is hard for me to understand why or how members of the government can stand and say there isn't any problem. I don't know what colour the sky is in the world you live in, but it's the same sky in Essex South as it is in Durham, in Mississauga, in Kenora and North Bay. I suspect that their offices are receiving the same calls we are, or there are some significant differences around this province that I'm not aware of.

Yes, this legislation is going in the right direction. It's allowing flexibility. It's allowing parents, if they can agree on the family support and the court sees this as being appropriate, to agree on this, but after this piece of legislation is in effect, it has to be able to be carried out. You have to give the resources in which this and other acts can be followed, and that is all we're asking.

We're asking that you take the concern you have shown in this bill and that you show that same concern with the changes that were made under Bill 82, the changes to the family support plan. As was pointed out before, the family support plan is money from spouses that is paid into a central area and then distributed to the spouse and children who need it.

We encourage you, when you use the word "expedite," that you do the same thing with the family support plan that you've done with this. We had an example today where under the family support plan it allows for the suspension of licences. The family support plan was adopted some months ago, and we understand that there is a very legitimate tool that is not being used yet. I encourage the government to move as quickly as possible, to take related pieces of legislation and put resources behind it so that yes, the backlog can be cleared up and our offices can move on to other business, but more important, that families in this province, spouses who have children, can put food on the table, can pay the rent, can pay the bills they have before them, because that is all any of us really want.

With that, I will reiterate that we support this bill and that I and the members of our caucus intend to vote in favour of it.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: Speaker, I want to indicate to you my appreciation and I think the appreciation of every member of this House of how you've listened carefully to all of the debate with acute attention because you understand, like folks out there do, that this is an incredibly important matter.

I say to the government members, please, if need be, take some leadership from your colleagues like Toni Skarica from Wentworth North and Bill Murdoch from Grey-Owen Sound or even Gary Carr from Oakville South. Show some courage and stand up and speak out, because you know there is a crisis with the family support plan. You know that it fell into total disarray. You've received the phone calls that my friend Mr Crozier referred to. You know that Bill 82 was passed almost 10 months ago and not one cent of arrears has been collected by this government with their 10 tough tools in Bill 82. Stand up and speak out for the people in your constituencies, like Toni Skarica, like Gary Carr, like Billy Murdoch. By God, they may not be as popular as some of you are in the Premier's office, but they're popular in their ridings and in their constituencies. Their constituents — the people in Wentworth North and the people in Oakville South and the people in Grey-Owen Sound — know that whether or not they always agree with their members — Toni Skarica, Bill Murdoch or Gary Carr — they've got members who have the courage of their convictions. They know they have members who aren't prepared to just stand here and read the line coming out of the Premier's office, the trite and oftentimes so unexciting speeches that are written for them by the spin doctors. Have courage my friends and take their leadership.

1730

Mr O'Toole: It's a privilege to respond to the member for Essex South. I would agree he's made a number of points which I would attempt to share with the viewers today and those who are listening in the House.

He was making reference to the Family Responsibility Office and he would know that our Bill 82 strengthened the functions and collection aspect of it. I want to talk about some of the differences: The old family support office had 90 enforcement officers; we've moved that to 139. People are receiving money quicker and faster. There were 24 phone lines handling only 6% of the 50,000 calls every day. We've now got 65 phone lines and we're able to handle 3,000 calls per day. Total disbursements per week between January and July 1996 were about $220 million. That had increased some 6% or 7% between January and July 1997, to $223 million.

I think most striking, though, is that in the old family support office the slow response caused 90,000 pieces of backlogged correspondence. Think about it, those were 90,000 inquiries looking into getting the money into the hands of those in need. We've cleared the backlog now, which means there are only 38,000 pieces of mail. We're working hard to solve it and we'll only be happy when there's zero backlog.

The issue here really is to streamline the process for the family and for those who are in need. If you look at the start of this process, we've had over 9,000 inquiries with the hotline. That's 1-800-980-4962. I'd encourage those people to call that. There are information sessions that are starting in October in 43 communities.

I want to conclude by saying the system will be faster and fairer for family support. In conclusion, we believe kids come first.

Mr Miclash: It's always a privilege to rise and comment on some of the comments made by the member for Essex South. But before I do that, I must comment on the previous speaker, the member for Durham East, who at one time indicated to his press that it was tough for him

to go home to face the comments that were being made by the Harris government. It was hard to handle the negativism that was coming back regarding the tax cut which this government continues to go forth and implement.

The member for Essex South brought up a very interesting comment when he talked about the resources that are needed to implement a lot of the plans that are put forth by any government. It reminded me of going back home and listening to some of the front-line workers. I'm talking about front-line workers who work for Comsoc. I'm talking about front-line workers who work for Natural Resources. I'm talking about board members, whether it be a board member for a hospital or a board member for a school board. They're also saying, "Yes, we hear about all these resources. We hear the Minister of Community and Social Services say there's all kinds of money out there for autistic children, there's all kinds of money out there for different programs."

I go back and talk to the front-line workers and they say: "We don't know about this resource. Where is it?" The member for Essex South is very correct in suggesting that the resources have to flow in order for these programs to actually get to the people who need them. Again, it doesn't matter how many announcements you make.

The member for Durham East can get up and talk about these wonderful program, but if the dollars don't flow, folks, the programs don't work, the children don't come first, they're not benefited. For you to stand here today and keep telling me that in terms of your government children come first, and for me to return home and find out that that's not the case — I can tell you what it is, but I can't say it in this House or I'll get thrown out.

Mr Len Wood: I just want to congratulate the member for Essex South. He was right on topic when dealing with Bill 128. It's intended to make uniformity between the federal legislation and the provincial legislation and make sure that the dollars flow from spouses to the children and that child support will have priority over spousal support.

If we look back at the mess that this government has made as a result of shutting down a number of offices last January and laying off hundreds of workers in that ministry — and it's not only that ministry. It's every other ministry where they've laid off, whether it's environment, natural resources or agriculture. In all the other ministries they've laid off thousands of workers across this province and they've created nothing but a mess.

I tour the province as well and I go into some of the Conservative ridings. I know that when they go home on the weekends, after about an hour out in the community the Conservative members have no choice but to retreat into the basement and take on a bunker mentality. They are being harassed something terrible for the sins of Mike Harris and the Minister of Labour and the mess that the Attorney General have made in this province.

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa-Rideau): With a $100-billion debt —

The Acting Speaker: The member for Ottawa-Rideau, come to order.

Mr Len Wood: We know some of the concerns with which they are trying to defend themselves in this Legislature but they can't defend themselves when they go home to their own ridings because they're telling them that their term of office is finished. They're gone. They're only into two and a half years and they're never going to be able to clean up the mess they've created

They're looking at alternatives. I'm sure that as we get into the campaign for the next election they will be looking at Howard Hampton and the NDP to form the next government in Ontario. I'm looking forward to that as well because I know it can happen. We had good government for five years and we've got a mess now that it's going to take a long time to clean up.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I just want to remind members it's 25 to 6. I realize hunger pains may be setting in. Control yourselves. You may not agree with what you hear from other members, but it's my job to make sure that they say it.

The Chair recognizes the member for Essex South.

Mr Crozier: I agree with almost everything that my friend from Cochrane North said, but not totally, and my friends from Welland-Thorold, Kenora and Durham East. Like my friend from Kenora, it was the comments of my friend from Durham East that interested me the most.

I agree that Bill 82 strengthened and gave tools to collect from those bad dads, for the most part, who are not paying their family support. The problem is that you haven't used the tools yet. That's what we're trying to tell you. You've got to use the tools. They're no good in the box, so get them out of the box.

He also mentioned some interesting statistics, not the least of which are the telephone lines you have. You've obviously forgotten your colleague from Grey-Owen Sound who had a private member's resolution that wanted to get rid of these telephone answering systems — voice mail. Why would the ministry have to supply us members with a specific private number to call about family support issues if it wasn't for the fact that you can't get through on the lines that you already have? What I guess we should do is give out 3,000 private numbers a day because this is what folks are telling you. They can't get through. They can't get satisfaction. The system is all bound up. Even if you get somebody to talk you, they can't give you an answer. All they want are the funds that are due to them.

You can give all kinds of tools, but if you don't use the tools they aren't worth the box they're in.

1740

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Further debate?

Mr Bisson: I would like to take this opportunity in debate on Bill 128 to use a specific example of something that's actually happening to a constituent of mine in my riding. I have his signed letter here, but I'm reluctant to use his name because I don't have his permission to utilize his name in full, so we'll just call this person Roger for this particular case.

Let's be clear what the government is doing here. The federal government has enacted legislation that reforms

the Divorce Act to require child support under the act to be determined according to child support guidelines which are prescribed by regulation. Those regulations are to be guided by a couple of points. In other words, if you go to divorce court and there is to be a support payment awarded by the court, the court has to follow guidelines under the federal regulations.

The child support guidelines consist of three major elements. The first is a table setting out the amount of child support to be awarded according to the pair's income and the number of children. So the court says, "All right, what does the meat chart say? According to how many kids you have and how much money you make, how much you should pay in support?" Then there are rules permitting an amount of child support other than in the table to be ordered and the procedure for obtaining income information and determining the amount.

The point here is that new guidelines the federal government established say: "We've got a meat chart. You make X dollars, you have X number of kids, you will pay Y amount of child support." It doesn't in my view take into consideration certain things that cause a problem. Let me give you this particular case, to be quite specific.

The provincial government in this case, under Bill 128, is bringing legislation that will mirror what the federal government is doing by statute. In other words, the federal government says, "We'll have these guidelines." The province says, "We're rubber-stamping the federal government's legislation and we will enact the very same rules in Ontario." There's a rationale for that, but I think the government has to take a look at some of the applications of this law as it applies to very special circumstances. I want to give you this particular one.

I have a constituent who writes this letter about a fictitious father. It talks about a father of three who got divorced back in 1982. He and his wife did not get along. They went through a divorce. At the time the divorce happened, the father made $30,000 per year. They eventually went to divorce court. The award was settled at $100 per month per child, for a total of $300. Time goes by. This particular individual remarries and has two children of his own in his second marriage. The wife remarries and goes on with her life with her new husband.

As time goes by, what happens is that the husband, who is now remarried, goes out and buys a car, like everybody else would like to be able to — nothing extravagant. He buys a house, has mortgage payments. Everything is based on what he accepted as the settlement for separation when he went to the divorce court with his former wife, that he would pay $300 per month. He expected that at one point the money would go up, but that the amount it would go up would be in relation to the income he had.

Unfortunately, what happens is his ex-wife's new husband dies in a car accident, so she's forced to go on social assistance to support herself. When she goes to social assistance, the new guidelines for the provincial government are that the social assistance people say, "Make sure that all arrears are paid and make sure the ex-husband is paying the full amount under the current law when it comes to support payments." The social assistance office tells the wife: "You need to take your ex-husband back to court, because since 1982 there have been new federal guidelines established and you will be able to get more money. We're telling you, you have to take this person to court." So this fellow now is taken back to court and his support payment is increased by some 300%.

The point the individual makes is that he accepts that he has to pay support. He accepts that he has a financial and moral responsibility when it comes to the children. But he's saying, "Is it fair for me and my new family that at this point I have to pay 300% extra over what I was paying before without any ability to take a look at if I can afford to pay?" When you work out the math in this particular individual's case, the total amount of money that he pays, he has nothing extravagant: a car payment, a mortgage payment and basically just the bills to keep the household going. No family vacations, no three-wheel vehicles, no snow machine, no Ski-Doos, nothing like that, just basic living.

When he takes into account his income of today against what the courts have awarded, he is not able to make that extra 300% payment the court has awarded. So he says, "The legislation is supposed to account for special circumstances." Under the federal legislation, they're saying there are guidelines that take into account special circumstances.

This particular individual is saying: "I accept that I have to pay the original amount. I also accept that I'm going to pay additional amounts because my ex-wife's circumstances have changed. But to increase that support payment by 300% over what it was before, that puts me in a position where I'm not able to make ends meet."

There should be some provision within the law where the courts and judges making these decisions are able to take a look at special circumstances, not just look at the meat chart and say, "You make X amount of money, you have X amount of children and I don't take into account anything else and I award X amount of dollars."

There should be some common sense used to say: "Yes, that's what the guidelines say, but in this particular case at this time this individual can't pay a 300% increase. We will therefore award X amount for a period of a year or two until financial circumstances change for one or the other," and a readjustment is then made on the ability to pay.

The fellow says, "I don't want to stop paying child support. In fact, I want to take my responsibilities, but don't bankrupt me, because the social assistance people are saying this has to be done" — so the province can get off the hook in paying the family benefits to his ex-wife.

This is what I'm asking the government to do: When this particular bill goes to committee, I think you need to take a look at the special provisions guidelines to ensure that the courts have some latitude in looking at how the award is given. If the person has the ability to pay, they should pay the full amount. There's no argument there. This individual says, "If I have the money, I'm prepared to pay. But in a case where I don't have the money at this

time because of circumstances" — it's unfortunate that his ex-wife's husband died in a car accident, but why is he made to pay? The point he's making is that you have to have special provision in the legislation to enable the courts to look at the ability to pay in a proper way.

The second thing he's saying is that the provisions of these guidelines as applied put his current family in jeopardy. He now has to work overtime, has to work on the side, has to do everything he can to make extra dollars to be able to afford the 300% increase in his child support payment. He says: "This is putting stress on my current family. My new wife and I are arguing because now I'm not at home all the time. I come home, I'm dog-tired, I've got to go back to work again and it's putting stress on my current family."

In the long run, as a society, we're not going to be better off if we end up in a situation where for whatever reason they end up getting separated because of the stress that is put on through this.

I'm asking the government, by way of this legislation, by way of Bill 128, to hear the pleas of Roger and try to put into this legislation special consideration for the ability to pay. No husband, no father should have the ability not to pay his family support. They have to take the responsibility, but it's got to be done within the context of ability to pay. As financial circumstances change, if the person is able to pay more at a later date, the courts can deal with it at that time, that as the person's income increases and expenses come down, the person's support payments are adjusted until the point where you get to the maximum amount.

I'd like to thank you, Mr Speaker, for the ability to speak to this particular bill. I would ask the government to take these comments from Roger seriously and take a look at how you can put in special provisions so that you can deal with ability to pay when it comes to support order payments.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Parker: Let me congratulate the member for Cochrane South for being the first opposition member in this debate to focus his remarks on the subject matter of the bill before us, which is Bill 128, An Act to amend the Family Law Act to provide for child support guidelines.

The member comments on the difficulties that are presented when there is a change in circumstances. We are aware of the difficulty that is created under those circumstances.

1750

That difficulty exists at present, and when there is a change in circumstances, that provides for a reapplication to the court for a change in the court order or for a change to the agreement. Those provisions will not change as a result of Bill 128, but what will change is that the subject matter of the court application will flow much more smoothly and much more readily than it does at present. Right now one of the most painful, agonizing and frankly expensive aspects of matrimonial litigation is not the break-up of the marriage itself — that's usually the one part that the parties agree to, and is dealt with fairly simply — but it's dealing with matters of children that is painful to all the parties, devastating to the children themselves and time-consuming and expensive in the process.

Bill 128 will bring the provincial law into conformity with the federal divorce law and provide for some uniformity and predictability in the resolution of those disputes having to do with child support. What it will mean is that there will be fewer people who have to go to court to battle these things out, because they will be guided towards arriving at a resolution out of court far more readily than they ever have in the past.

Who likes this? Well, one person is Carole Curtis, a Toronto lawyer: "It is important that the province have the same law as the federal law —

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I also want to compliment the member for Cochrane South for his remarks, short as they were, only 10 minutes as we're now into that segment of debate, and certainly support his call for some amendments, which would be very positive and should be listened to, I hope, by the government members.

I want to use my time just to speak on behalf of the literally hundreds of constituents who have come to my office particularly in the last year and a half who have not been treated at all well by the system, by a government that basically put forward a bill, closed down regional offices of the family support plan and continues to talk as if the system is working better, when we know, those of us who are dealing with these people on a daily basis, the system is not working.

People still cannot get through. People are still not receiving the support they are supposed to be receiving. So we have women and children in this province, and certainly in Thunder Bay that is the case, who are still well behind in the payments not because the money isn't there but because the money is locked into the system under the new Family Responsibility Office.

It is extraordinarily important to note that despite what the government members will continually say as they trot out their statistics, the fact is that the people in my riding and in Thunder Bay, and I think all across Ontario are being treated in a manner that is nothing less than insulting, and it's extremely frustrating for them. They come to us and in many ways we become their office, we become the place they can go to, because at least we apparently have some good contact with the office. But the contact even from our point of view can be very difficult.

I want to speak on behalf of those people who still come into our office, still look for help, have not been well served by the family responsibility changes. We know that a lot of the issues in terms of Bill 128 could be dealt with very handily by the regional offices as they were set up, and I still wish that was in place.

Mr Lessard: My colleague from Cochrane South brings up an interesting situation of a client in his own riding with respect to what sorts of problems can happen, and it's an unusual situation, certainly. That's a case where a support order was made 15 years ago and these parties entered into an agreement based on the situation at

that time. Both parties went their own way and got remarried, but because of an unfortunate death of one of the former spouses they were able to go back to court and have this variation made.

Nobody knows how this legislation is going to be interpreted. That was interpreted according to the federal guidelines that were introduced in May, as I understand the story. This person did what he was supposed to do. He went to court and it was interpreted, as I understand it, and they didn't take into consideration the special circumstances the way he felt they should be.

But it really brings up something else, and that is that there are going to be a great many people who are going to make applications for variations to their support orders, either upwards or downwards. What we've found with this government in other decisions they've made and other programs they've implemented is that they've moved too far too fast and they've brought in things without having any consideration of the impact they're going to have.

They haven't put in place the systems necessary to try to deal with this huge increase in variation applications that are going to be brought. With cuts to the legal aid plan, there is going to be reduced access for women to bring applications to vary their support upward. Their enforcement mechanisms aren't working. They closed the regional offices without knowing what the impact was going to be. They've created a mess.

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the speech of the member for Cochrane South and the recent comments by the member for Windsor-Riverside with respect to going too far too fast. My goodness, here we are trying to put through legislation for guidelines for the support of single mothers and children in Ontario and he says we're going too fast and too far. It seems to me we should expedite this as quickly as possible in the interests of those who suffer from marriage breakdown and their children in Ontario. I'm surprised the honourable member would indicate that this ought to be done slowly as opposed to as quickly as possible, but that's his view.

This policy, this bill, is designed to make support orders more consistent and more predictable in the province. Presently, as the member for York East indicated, we have a significant delay and significant expense caused by the fact that there are no guidelines, there are no references that people can have access to in order to make their own assessment of where they're likely to fall in terms of support for themselves and their children in cases of marriage breakdown.

This is consistent with the civil justice reforms the Attorney General has initiated with respect to mandatory mediation in civil matters, with respect to case management in civil matters, all designed, again, to increase consistency, predictability, reduce delay and thereby reduce expense.

Also we have the Agency Reform Commission, which is chaired by my colleague the member for Ottawa-Rideau, again designed to reduce the number of commissions in Ontario, to reduce delay and to reduce expense in cases dealing with administrative tribunals; we have many in the province, soon to be fewer.

I urge all members to put kids first and get this legislation passed as quickly as possible in the interests of the families of Ontario.

The Speaker: Responses?

Mr Bisson: In the two minutes I have left, I want to make the point to the government that when you go through looking at this bill at the committee level and you deal with it when it comes to dealing with amendments, you need to take a look at the question of special provisions.

This is but one case, the case of Roger in my constituency. Through no fault of his own or his ex-wife, the situation has changed. The wife has been forced to go back, because she has gone on FSP, to the courts to get the former amount of support payments changed and because of these new federal guidelines he's being asked to pay a 300% increase in his support payments. He is saying he's prepared to pay, he's prepared to pay the maximum based on how much he's making and how much he's able to pay.

The courts have to be able to deal with that in a progressive way, to turn around and say, "One, yes, I will pay; number two, look at my income, look at my circumstances when it comes to my debts." The courts have to deal with debts in a real way, not allowing people to load a bunch of debt on to themselves so that they don't make their payments, but to take a look in a progressive way at how we can deal with this so we don't put the second family in jeopardy when it comes to their ability to make payment to that first particular support payment.

I would like to thank the members opposite for my being able to have made these comments. I hope the government, in looking at these amendments, deals with Roger's concern in an effective way so that the courts are able to deal with this when it comes to special provisions. I also believe there isn't a quorum in the House.

On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I don't believe there's a quorum in the House.

The Speaker: Quorum, please.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Speaker: It now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:30 of the clock this evening.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening sitting reported in volume B.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 24 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 24 septembre 1997

The House met at 1830.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FARMING AND FOOD PRODUCTION PROTECTION ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'AGRICULTURE ET DE LA PRODUCTION ALIMENTAIRE

Mr Villeneuve moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to protect Farming and Food Production / Projet de loi 146, Loi protégeant l'agriculture et la production alimentaire.

Hon Noble Villeneuve (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs): At the outset I beg indulgence of the House to permit me to share my opening statement time with the member for Hastings-Peterborough and the member for Durham East.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: Thank you, colleagues. First of all, we have a number of very distinguished guests in the members' gallery. We have representatives from the executive committee of the OFA, members from the sheep marketing board, the land use committee of the OFA, Ontario pork producers' representation, Ontario cattlemen's and other commodity groups. I want to welcome you here with us tonight.

It is my great pleasure this evening to introduce for second reading Bill 146, An Act to protect Farming and Food Production. It was a promise we made in the rural economic development task force and I believe it's the last promise we are in the process of completing. We have very strong support from the food production areas of Ontario.

This proposed legislation is crucial to protecting the ability of farmers to continue producing an abundant supply of wholesome, high-quality, affordable food and other agricultural products for Ontario's consumers and for the markets around the world. It reasserts this government's commitment to agriculture and food production as the vibrant, competitive and growing sector that it is.

Just to outline some things that some of my colleagues possibly are not aware of: It annually contributes $25 billion to the provincial economy; employs well over 600,000 people and creates more jobs every year; and exports products worth well over $5 billion annually to the far reaches of the globe, products that are recognized the world over as being of the highest quality.

In order to continue feeding all of us as well as creating jobs and economic growth, our farmers need assurances that they can conduct their normal business practices without fear of nuisance lawsuits and unnecessary restrictive bylaws. While we have a law that provides this kind of protection, it is limited and out of date and no longer effective.

In the previous 10 years since the Farm Practices Protection Act was introduced, the population mix in rural Ontario has changed, with more urban people moving into our rural areas. New, innovative kinds of farming are being introduced, involving non-traditional livestock and crops. Modern normal farming practices include activities not covered under the current legislation, and on-farm activities in which farmers add value to the commodities they produce are indeed increasing.

Times have changed and the current act has not changed with the times. Before this government was elected, we went out and listened to farmers and rural residents and this legislation was one of their key concerns. They told us that protection provided was not adequate. The legislation did not cover a number of modern farming activities. It did not apply to new and innovative operations that were starting up all over the province. There was concern about increasing conflict over restrictive municipal bylaws.

We made a pledge then that we would put in place a law that is more in step with the times; a law that protected the rights of farmers using normal farming practices to continue raising the food products we all use without having to resort to unnecessary, time-consuming and costly litigation; a law that would protect Ontario's ability both now and in future generations to maintain a growing, thriving job creating agrifood sector.

The bill before us today does this because it balances the rights of those who conduct their farming businesses in rural Ontario with the rights of all those who live in rural Ontario. It adheres to our strong health, safety, and I emphasize, environmental standards. It is forward-looking, providing much-needed protection for today's farmers and for generations to come, and builds on the tremendous environmental work that has been done by farmers and farm organizations over the past 10 years.

As an example, the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition has been working since the early 1990s with farmers across the province, encouraging them to conduct farming activities in a manner that respects the environment. Dozens of farm organizations and marketing boards are involved in the coalition, including the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, AgCare and the Ontario Farm Animal Council. All told, the coalition represents thousands of farmers and rural people.

Central to the coalition's efforts are environmental farm plans. These individual plans set out opportunities for environmental enhancement and provide a strategy for making low-cost, highly effective changes on the farm. In combination with educational workshops, technical advice, peer reviews and funding incentives, the plans are helping farmers make environmental improvements in their own operations. It's voluntary, it's working, and you may even ask why. Well, it's because farmers care.

So far, 10,000 participants have attended local EFP workshops. Close to 5,000 peer-approved plans have been developed. Last fall, the coalition launched phase 2 of the program, with a primary goal of involving 6,000 new farmers by the year 2000. I'm proud that the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has been involved from the beginning, providing technical expertise to develop program materials and answers to technical questions during workshops sponsored by the ministry.

I know from years of experience the significant changes that are occurring in rural Ontario. Having been a farmer and a rural resident for decades myself, I can understand the attraction that draws people from the city to the countryside. For most it is a more tranquil, less rushed and more desirable lifestyle, and I think we all understand that.

There's a real sense of community in rural living. Neighbours generally get along and help one another out. That's why so many have decided to make the move from, say, the streets of downtown Toronto, London or Ottawa to the concession roads of rural Ontario, and we welcome them. But make no mistake: For farmers it is their place of business that these people have moved into, with all the challenges and opportunities that entails.

1840

The business of farming has evolved rapidly. In the year 1900, at the turn of the century that we're now completing, each farmer fed about 12 people and about 50 cents of every consumer dollar earned was spent on food. With growing populations, farmers have been called upon to boost their productivity, and indeed they have.

Today the average farmer feeds more than 120 people and our food prices are among the world's lowest, with food costing only about 12.5 cents of every dollar earned. Fewer than 3% of Canadians operate farms, yet they produce enough food and other numerous commodities such as herbs for pharmaceuticals, flowers, flax for fibre and feedstock for alternative fuels to supply most of the domestic and many import markets. And let's not forget, they accomplish all this in an environmentally responsible way. That is of utmost importance and I want to emphasize that throughout this presentation.

Farmers are the original environmentalists. They, more than anyone, know the importance of taking care of air, water and soil. These elements are literally their lifelines, the farmer's way of earning his or her living. They, more than anyone, understand that you need a productive, safe and healthy environment for things to go well on the farm. That's the first step in the production of wholesome, high-quality food that very often our consumers take for granted.

It's also a driving force for some of the non-food commodities, such as ethanol. It's what consumers demand and, as importantly, it's what farmers expect of themselves and wish to produce. That's why farmers and farm groups invest their time and money in many initiatives aimed at protecting our environment. Besides environmental farm plans, there are countless projects involving millions of farmers' hard-earned dollars aimed at such things as reducing pesticide use, improving tilling practices, developing more efficient manure management practices, erosion control, and we could name many others.

Farmers see these projects as long-term investments both in the environment and in their own businesses. For farmers, the two are connected at the most basic level. You cannot have one without the other.

I think we can all agree that creating a climate in which farmers continue to provide us with high-quality, affordable food without unnecessary restrictions is not only a worthwhile goal, but it's indeed a must. I think most of my colleagues in this Legislature would agree with that. That's why we're putting forward this balanced piece of legislation, and I emphasize the word "balanced" because it was carefully crafted after extensive public consultations were carried out by the parliamentary assistant to yours truly, the MPP for Hastings-Peterborough, my colleague Harry Danford, with help from Lambton MPP Marcel Beaubien. That's the way we like to do things: to ensure that new policy or legislation meets the needs of those it will affect. I emphasize, these were pre-bill consultations from farmers and rural residents across Ontario.

Earlier this year, my colleague Mr Danford did an excellent job gathering information, opinions and suggestions from farmers, rural municipal leaders and other stakeholders at eight meetings across this province. The response was most encouraging. More than 850 people attended these meetings and more than 60 written submissions were received. We received excellent input regarding the review of the current law and insights into how the new legislation could best be written and put into effect.

I certainly want to thank my friends across the province from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, normally known as ROMA, and many commodity groups that also contributed tremendously to both the consultation process and the development of the bill. I'd also like to thank all of the rural residents who took time to share their concerns and the issues, because

they contributed immensely to bringing balance to this legislation.

Many of those suggestions are incorporated in the bill. It's a bill that's before the House today for second reading, a bill that we hope to have become law before the end of this year. I believe, and I think my honourable colleagues will agree, that the bill does what we all set out to do: strengthen the protection of farming and food production while keeping in harmony with health, safety and the environment. The proposed act provides added protection for farmers without overriding or duplicating other legislation and policies designed to protect the public of this province.

Farmers have told me again and again that their interest in strengthening this legislation is so they can get on with the day-to-day operations of their farms, what they know how to do best. They have said emphatically that they do not want a licence to pollute. I emphasize: They do not want nor does this grant them a licence to pollute.

Therefore, the new law would continue to be subject to the provincial Environmental Protection Act, the Pesticides Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act and the Ontario Water Resources Act. Further, it would adhere to cabinet-approved policy statements. Farmers understand thoroughly the need to have these safeguards in place. They understand better than anyone the need to safeguard their environment. That's why they have wholeheartedly agreed with these provisions.

At the same time, the proposed act deals constructively with the emerging concerns around unduly restrictive municipal bylaws. Before its implementation, the ministry, our farm groups and municipalities will be working together to increase awareness among municipal decision-makers about what are the normal, modern farming practices.

Under the new law, the minister would be able to issue farm practices policy statements which can also be used by municipalities as guidelines in helping them develop new bylaws.

At the same time, a public awareness program would focus on the realities of living in rural Ontario. This would be accomplished in cooperation with farm and rural groups, along with realtors or real estate agents who are involved on numerous occasions in the transfer of titles and properties. We have to do a better job of informing people who move to rural areas that farms are also places of business where sometimes the crop can't wait until after the weekend to be harvested; where at the height of the season greenhouse operators have to run the lights all night; where weather conditions mean that farm equipment could well be running 24 hours a day. We do know that grain dryers, once the season starts, run 24 hours a day.

We must also do a better job in reminding everyone that Ontario's economic roots are firmly planted in our farmers' fields in rural Ontario and that we all depend on a healthy, wholesome and affordable food supply and all of the non-food products that also come from those very same fields and farms in rural Ontario.

I know that some farmers already regularly advise their neighbours when they need to combine or spread manure on an adjacent field. Often the timing of these activities can be worked out to everyone's satisfaction. If it doesn't or can't happen, staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs are quite knowledgeable and adept at helping mediate resolutions between neighbours before disputes escalate. These measures are designed to head off needless confrontation before it occurs and that too is the way we like to do things. That's why we had pre-bill consultation last winter and early spring.

The vast majority of conflicts in the past, and I'm confident those that we will have in the future, will be settled either among the parties themselves or with mediation help from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs staff. However, if after all these avenues have been exhausted the dispute continues, the issue can be brought before the new Normal Farm Practices Protection Board for a ruling on a specific farm practice. I see application to the board as a last resort. If the board rules that the farm practice in question is normal, the bylaw would not apply in that one specific case, and these cases will all be handled on an individual basis.

There have been a few concerns raised since this bill was introduced in June: that it would leave municipalities powerless to govern in their own development; and that large, intensive farms could be built without regard to local councils' or residents' wishes.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): It doesn't matter. You're going to amalgamate them all. You're turn Ontario into one large Chatham-Kent.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Algoma.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: I want to assure everyone that all farming operations, regardless of size, will continue to be required to adhere to current environmental laws and regulations. Farmers wouldn't have it any other way, nor would this government.

At the same time, we intend to increase representation from rural municipalities to the new board. This change would help ensure that a balanced approach is taken to making rulings and that the rights of everyone in rural Ontario are taken into serious consideration.

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): You're going to turn rural Ontario into a megacity.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Cochrane North.

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Hon Mr Villeneuve: The board's central role under the act is to determine whether or not the activity in question is a normal farm practice. In their deliberations, board members will take into account such things as the purpose of the bylaw, the effect of the practice on abutting lands and whether the bylaw reflects a provincial interest as established under legislation or policy statements. I have every confidence that the new board will have the necessary experience and knowledge to make fair and balanced decisions, I emphasize again, on what is a normal farm practice. It's not complicated.

Bill 146 is a major improvement over current legislation for a number of reasons. It clarifies what

constitutes an agricultural operation and sets out more specifically the kinds of businesses included. As examples, farmers now raise emus or ostriches. Beekeepers, maple syrup producers, these are all added under the new law. It spells out that normal farming practices are those that are consistent with proper and acceptable customs and standards followed by the industry. It adds light, vibration, smoke and flies to the current list of noise, odour and dust as the effects that can be expected from normal modern farming practices. It includes activities that farmers may undertake on their farms to add value to the commodities they produce.

Let's not forget that a strong, viable farming sector in turn provides the input to maintain a strong, competitive food manufacturing and distribution system in Ontario. We have seen investment in food manufacturing rebound tremendously in the past two years in response to the improved business climate.

The proposed Farming and Food Production Protection Act is indeed a bill whose time has come. Just ask people like Neil McCaig, who is the fourth generation of his family to work his farm just outside Guelph, in the shadow of the city. He welcomes the proposed legislation, and after its first reading said, "We are seeing the city build up so fast, and this government says farmers need protection against those fast-growing urban areas." Neil is a lot like the tens of thousands of other family farmers in rural Ontario who want to ensure that both he and future generations can continue to work the land and supply our tables with wholesome, abundant, affordable food.

In fact, the new bill has a lot of supporters throughout rural Ontario even before it's passed. Here is a sampling. A Woodstock Sentinel-Review editorial states, "...we must protect what's left of our prime agricultural land. And that means giving our farmers the right to carry out the necessary chores which contribute to our province's multibillion-dollar agrifood business" sector " — without the hassles."

An editorial headline in the St Thomas Times-Journal says, "It Takes Noise to Grow...Food." Some of the politicians in here make that noise, but I know they don't produce any food.

An editorial in The Guelph Mercury said, "The proposed legislation is a prudent move —

Mr Len Wood: Careful, or you'll wake up one of your members. He's sleeping.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Cochrane North, order.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: — as urban development rapidly encroaches on farm lands."

Mary O'Connor, of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, who happens to be here tonight, said in the Brantford Expositor, "It's good for the farmers of Ontario because the government of the day is recognizing agriculture as a major provincial interest."

Even my honourable colleague the leader of the third party said, "I agree that farmers and the work farmers do is very valuable for this province, and that work needs to be protected."

I'm pleased that there continues to be strong support in the rural areas of Ontario for the hardworking people who produce the food we consume and the many non-food products we all use. I trust that Bill 146 will receive equally strong support here in this Legislature. The bill is one of several forward-looking initiatives that show this government remains committed to Ontario's agrifood industry in our rural communities.

Further examples: The rural job strategy will see $30 million of new money to go towards cost-shared projects which will boost economic development and job creation in rural Ontario. The strategy that was announced by my colleague the Minister of Finance in the May budget was this $30-million rural job strategy. Since then my colleague Barb Fisher, MPP from Bruce, conducted public consultation with farmers and rural residents and others across the province to ensure that the program meets their needs. I'm looking forward to launching the strategy in the next few weeks and I'm confident that this initiative will accomplish our goal of boosting business competitiveness, export investments and, most important, jobs in rural Ontario.

On the research front, the ministry has joined a group of agrifood companies, commodity groups, universities and financial institutions called Ontario Agri-Food Research. We've invested $1 million over five years in this non-profit corporation, which is dedicated to bringing scientific advances from the lab to the market. Our enhanced partnership between the agreement of the University of Guelph is successfully increasing the efficiency and responsiveness in the delivery of essential research lab and education programming.

J'aimerais en ce moment souligner le fait qu'une entente entre l'Université Guelph et les collèges, tels Ridgetown, Kemptville et Alfred, a eu une réaction très positive, et nos initiatives nous ont fourni plus d'inscriptions dans nos collèges et nos universités agricoles cette année que dans les 10 dernières années, et les nouveaux diplômés ont des emplois quand ils terminent leurs études.

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Just one example is a major, half-million-dollar project looking to improve production and processing technologies for high-end, food-grade quality corn as well as enhanced corn drying and storage technology, and this was financed through the Grow Ontario program. There's a golden opportunity in products like tacos and corn chips that our producers and processors can take advantage of. With an expected 15% annual growth rate, this market definitely is on the front-end investment in research, and it's only one of the many other markets that could be explored with improved technology. This is a truly industry-wide effort, because the corn producers, processors, seed companies, the University of Guelph and Ridgetown college are all involved. I am pleased that through that Grow Ontario program we were able to invest $227,000, or about half the cost of this research project, which will inevitably bear fruit.

In marketing and investment, we're encouraging the development of products that add value to raw commodi-

ties, which will pay big dividends for the agrifood sector and for the entire province. A successful example is the new ethanol industry which this government has supported from its very earliest stages. I'm pleased to report that the Commercial Alcohols ethanol production facility in Chatham is going to be operational in December, fully two months ahead of schedule. Full production will begin January. Ethanol blends continue to be very popular at the pumps, and I understand that Sunoco is ready to do a major marketing of the blend in all their Ontario locations once the Commercial Alcohols plant comes on stream and the supply of Ontario-produced ethanol is more plentiful. This is terrific news for the industry, the Ontario economy and the environment. With production set at 150 litres a year, the Commercial Alcohols facility alone creates a substantial new market for farmers and the commodities they produce.

Ethanol production is the kind of activity that we will continue to support. It adds value to raw commodities, it boosts the rural economy and it creates new markets. It's a creator of jobs. In fact, the Commercial Alcohols plant has already given work to between 400 and 500 construction workers over the past two years and will employ some 45 full-time, high-tech people once the plant is open and operating on a 24-hour basis.

We're also committed to working with the industry to further develop export markets. We're determined to reach our target of doubling agrifood exports to $10 billion a year by the year 2001, and we're well on our way. These exports increased nearly 12% between 1995 and 1996. This year, between January and May, they increased again by more than $100 million over the same period last year. These exports are mainly to the US and to the Pacific Rim.

When you consider that every $1 billion of exports to other countries creates about 12,000 jobs in our local Ontario economy, I think we all realize the importance of the agrifood sector and the importance of these markets and exports.

This government has and will continue to encourage a strong agrifood sector and rural economy. We're doing it today with the second reading of the timely and much-needed Farming and Food Production Protection Act. I believe, and I think that all members can agree, that it achieves a balance between protecting the rights of those who farm in rural Ontario with all those who live in rural Ontario. With this legislation, we will continue working with the people of Ontario who contribute so much to our very high standard of living.

We'll forge ahead with research and technology advances, explore new markets here at home and around the globe, and boost investment and competitiveness throughout the province. We'll do our utmost to assist rural communities to reach their potential as full participants in the bright economic future ahead for Ontario's agrifood industry. Most of all, we'll continue to create a climate in which those who produce food and those who consume it can go on reaping the rewards of one of our most highly respected and vital industries. Ontario is known worldwide as a very high quality food producer and exporter, and I am very proud of that reputation, because when Ontario's agrifood industry thrives, everyone in Ontario benefits.

Mr Harry Danford (Hastings-Peterborough): I too am pleased to speak this evening in support of Bill 146, An Act to protect Farming and Food Production, and I want to spend a few moments to review how Bill 146 was prepared. Along with my colleague the member for Lambton, I was involved in the consultation process leading to this bill and I want to personally assure the House that the consultation process was both extensive and comprehensive.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Minister Villeneuve for providing me with the opportunity to be involved in the consultation and the input to Bill 146. It gave me the opportunity not only to work on this important piece of legislation for our government but also to meet face to face with a great many people from all walks of life in rural Ontario, and many have chosen to be with us here tonight. Whether it was in Ridgetown, New Liskeard or Barrie, rural residents spoke up about their concerns and gave freely of their ideas and suggestions on how we can get this bill right. I also want to assure the members that we listened with equal concern and care.

When we started this process, we asked our key stakeholders about the best means of consulting, and we worked closely with those stakeholders, those who would be affected by the bill. We established an advisory committee whose members provided excellent advice and became our partners in the consultation process. Those partners included the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario and the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. The advisory committee also included representatives of the Farm Practices Protection Board, the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The resulting consultation process was designed to include several methods of gathering input. We held open meetings at various locations across the whole province. We requested written submissions as well. We participated at the annual meeting of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. We held discussions, as well, with the Farm Practices Protection Board.

I was involved in eight public meetings between January 23 and February 6 of this year. The meetings were held across the province: Ridgetown, Walkerton, Alfred, Kemptville, Peterborough, New Liskeard, Barrie and Brantford. The meeting in New Liskeard incorporated telephone connections to Dryden, Emo, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste Marie, Gore Bay, Verner, Kapuskasing and Huntsville. I think it's fair to say that we ensured that both farming and non-farming residents from across this province had an opportunity to talk to us about this proposed legislation.

We recognize the concerns of non-farming rural residents, but I would like to reaffirm what the minister said about farmers being the original environmentalists. It is in the farmers' best interests to properly maintain the land they farm. All the participants were keenly aware of the

importance of maintaining high standards for safety, health and environment, but none more so than the farmers themselves. Over 850 people attended these sessions: 75% were farmers, 20% were municipal politicians or their staff and 5% represented rural non-farm residents.

Prior to the public meetings, OMAFRA issued a discussion paper on the Farm Practices Protection Act to help identify the issues, and we used this paper to begin our small group discussions at the public meetings. Oral and written reports from the groups were collected at each meeting to ensure that every participant's view was documented. Another open meeting was organized by the local Federation of Agriculture in Kirkton, Ontario, and the format of their meeting mirrored that of those organized by OMAFRA.

We also wanted to make sure that we received input from rural municipalities. To that end, the member for Lambton and I participated in the annual conference of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association in February of this year, and in an open session, over 700 conference delegates were given the opportunity to comment on the Farm Practices Protection Act. As well, members of the Farm Practices Protection Board had an opportunity to provide their firsthand knowledge during a discussion at one of their board meetings.

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Our consultation process also included written submissions, as I mentioned. In response to the ministry's request for these comments, 66 organizations and individuals provided comments either through the mail or electronically. Who responded? Twenty-seven percent of the written submissions came from individual farmers, 26% from farm organizations, 21% from municipal councils and planners across the province, 11% from producer and grower organizations and 15% from concerned rural residents.

I think you can agree we did indeed conduct extensive and comprehensive consultation to ensure that all interested parties had an opportunity to comment, and because of this process we received a full spectrum of comments.

We listened carefully to all the comments and concerns we heard at the province-wide meetings, we reviewed all the written submissions with equal care and, as a result, I want to assure my colleagues in the House this evening that we have proposed legislation that balances the right of farmers to conduct their business with the rights of all residents who live within our rural communities.

As Minister Villeneuve has told you, our guiding principle throughout the review of the current Farm Practices Protection Act was to strength the protection of farming and food production, while keeping keep it in harmony with health, safety and indeed the environment. Our aim was to ensure that the agrifood sector, which is after all Ontario's second-largest economic contributor, could continue fuelling economic growth and creating jobs without unnecessary restrictions.

We want to reinforce agriculture and food production as a provincial interest and meet the needs of the rural community as well., which I might say was the request at our ROMA meeting we had in February. It came from the floor of the municipalities that we establish agriculture as a provincial interest. With this proposed legislation, we're reaffirming our confidence in the province's farmers as valued generators of economic growth and as contentious custodians of the environment.

Our consultation confirmed that the current 10-year-old legislation does not meet the needs of today's growing rural population or its farmers. It is out of date and simply ineffective. The proposed legislation will remedy that situation, not only for today's agrifood industry but indeed for generations to come.

As the members know, our ministry's stakeholders come from all walks of life in rural Ontario. Our government has recognized that they may all be affected by this bill. We have an obligation to strengthen the production of farming and food production, and an equal obligation to maintain the health, safety and the environment of rural Ontario. With Bill 146 we have fulfilled these obligations.

I believe that this bill, if passed, will work for the benefit of all residents of rural Ontario. For the first time, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will be able to give advice to municipalities on what is acceptable in a bylaw that will affect food production, and this is something that municipalities have asked for.

Bill 146 will balance the need for a secure food supply with other equally important issues such as health, safety and the environment. This bill will support the needs of our growing agrifood sector and the needs of all those who live and work in rural Ontario. That was our goal when we started out on the consultations and I think we have achieved our goal with this bill, Bill 146.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): I first want to thank, and feel very privileged that the minister, Noble Villeneuve, has asked me to contribute to this debate tonight. It's a pleasure for me to follow the member from Hastings-Peterborough, Mr Danford. I know just how hard he works and his contribution and knowledge in support of the agricultural industry today.

With respect to Bill 146, I monitored the process. In fact, I asked the minister to listen to input from my constituents in Durham East, and let me just speak for a moment about my riding of Durham East.

Durham East is a very unique, high-performance, high-productivity area in the agricultural sector of this very important province, and I am very proud to represent the agricultural sector, my riding of Durham East, here at Queen's Park.

Agriculture, as Mr Danford and the minister have said, is the second-largest industry in Ontario, and I'd like the members to know that in the riding of Durham, in fact the whole region of Durham, agriculture is the second most important industry both in employment and in dollars added to the value of Durham region's economy, a multi-million dollar agribusiness. In fact, it's the most important and successful growing sector in our economy.

This isn't done by any stretch by the minister alone, and the minister has clearly acknowledged tonight the important contributors. The important contributors are our

partners; the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers and all the producer groups. It would be remiss of me not to mention some of them, and the more important ones I might add are the poultry producers, the Ontario Cattlemen's Association, the corn producers, all the other producer groups, and all of them are represented very clearly in my riding.

The gross product value is $25 billion and, as the minister said, over 600,000 jobs are created by the agricultural sector; $5 billion annually in exports of very high quality products. That's something each one of us, all members regardless of party, should be very proud of and support the producer sector in our economy and in our riding, most importantly in our riding.

Let me speak for a moment to the importance in my riding of Durham East. I look around, and I was trying to think about it to make a few comments tonight. I've been limited in the amount of time I can contribute, but the first name that came to mind when I was thinking through was that the first person who really contributed to my involvement in public life was a gentleman by the name of Garnet Rickard. He has since passed away; well respected, Order of Canada, one of the leaders in the agricultural sector in our economy, well recognized and respected.

The tradition of farming is carried on by the family, the Rickard family and his wife Annabel, who succeeded him. She's sort of the mother of the whole industry, if you will, and there are Don and Gail Rickard and they're still carrying on in the farm business, and Jim and Ramona Rickard, all of whom are committed and their family. I've met and know those people personally people. They're in the apple business and the cash crop business, and their families are absolutely committed to agriculture.

What does it mean to be committed to agriculture? The minister mentioned it and Mr Danford mentioned it as well; it really starts with the whole aspect of farm stewardship. This bill addresses some recognition of noise and other nuisance kind of bylaws, but the farming industry itself has taken the role of steward, and I consider it — it's been explained to me by many farmers and many families — that the land is the factory. Would it make any sense for them to contaminate the factory, the land, the soil, the air, the water they so depend on for the value and the contribution?

There's only 3% of the total number of inhabitants actually owning and operating farms, 3% of all the people employed, but every farm that I drive by feeds 120 families. So think about it: When you drive by, there has to be some understanding and respect for their contribution not only to the economy, which we talk about, but they feed us. They are the bread basket of this province.

I know the producer groups individually have their issues, as does the federation, but they work together, and whether it's the milk marketing board or the other boards, they have supply-demand issues that they try to deal with and I think they are doing a marvellous job.

I have to remind people in my riding, as kind of urban and rural — the urban people come to me as they move into the countryside and they have some concerns about operations that may be at night, harvesting or a corn dryer or whatever kind of operation, and I try to tell them, "Milk doesn't come from Beckers; it comes from a cow." They have to be reminded. They have to be reminded. It sounds overly simplistic, but I'm going to refer back to my riding, because my riding of Durham East, which is east of Oshawa, includes Port Perry, north Oshawa, the municipality of Clarington —

Mr Len Wood: Your people are going to love you for that. All the urban people are suing him.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Cochrane North, you are out of your seat.

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Mr O'Toole: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'm starting to have to yell over the noise. I know they're somewhat agitated, but I'd expect they would support the agricultural community, and I'm waiting and anxious to hear their comments.

I was very pleased to be with the minister on June 26, when he introduced this legislation. In fact, with me there was Brenda Elliott, Doug Rollins and Harry Danford, of course, the PA to the minister, myself and Ted Arnott, the member for Wellington. It was in his riding, at a dairy farm in Wellington, where the minister made this important announcement. The public were excited, but also the agricultural community was excited. Everyone seems to agree.

I consulted with people in my riding during the process of looking at the Farm Practices Protection Act and the issues specific in this legislation. I talked to farmers like Dave Frew, who is very well known, with his father, Don, a highly respected operator in my riding. They run a very large operation, almost 2,000 acres, and they have a large pork producer operation and a corn and cash crop operation. I asked him what kinds of things, and he said: "You know, it's kind of the smell and the noise issues. The city folk are moving out. We need to have some protection for our investment." They put the money in the ground before they get one cent back. Even the weather can turn on a farmer, and really we have to support them.

I look around again, and I want to go back to my riding. Going through my riding lists, I recognized first that probably one of the more important commodities is apples. Kirk Kemp is at the apple growers' association, and he's a very well-respected operator in my riding of Durham East. Ted Watson, of Ted Watson Farms, is very well respected; one of the first pick-your-own operations in the area. Wilmot Orchards, which was Charles Stevens; Charles has a mixed fruit-growing operation. Twin Brand Orchards with the Gibson family is well known, well respected.

But on the leading edge, the entrepreneurial edge, I've gotten to know Sandy and Fred Archibald. Just recently they opened up a winery section. Talk about diversification and investing in the future. There is a very innovative, creative couple, a young family making huge investments in jobs and contribution to the gross domestic product. They're starting a wine operation just north of Bowmanville. I wish them success.

Irwin Smith is also just south of Port Perry in my riding of Durham East. Irwin and his family, a long-practising, long-tradition family, three or four generations, have opened Ocala wines. They're producing hybrid grapes. Can you imagine? This isn't the Niagara region I'm talking about. It talks about the imagination and creativity and diversification of our farm operations today. I commend those people who make the investment of time and person for the betterment of themselves, of course, at great risk, but more importantly for the betterment of all of Ontario.

I'd be remiss not to mention the Price's market in Bowmanville. My children all worked there in the gardens. It's a garden-farm marketing operation which has grown profoundly over the years, offering fresh Ontario produce to the visitors and the tourists driving along on Highway 2 through Bowmanville. They're well known. In fact, many people have their first corn from Price's Market. Not to somehow market the different groups here, but Pingle's Farm Market as well in Courtice is very well respected.

I could go on and on, but I've mentioned a number of the more important contributors. It isn't just the farm producer groups, it's the whole attachment, it's the whole industry. I'm trying to think. There are three or four farm implements dealers that not only employ mechanics and sales people but provide a service to the agricultural community. They employ people, they create wealth, they create jobs. It's important. This government has to work with that farm implement dealers group as well.

When I think of my riding, Durham East, it's so diverse. For example, Tyrone Mills is one of the oldest still-operating mills. They have a completely water-powered apple cider crushing kind of operation. It's a must-visit. I commend the Schaffers for investing their time and resources into making a full, live demonstration, a real working product of how a farm and farm operations have survived over the years and indeed, as I said about the wine producing, have prospered.

There's another fellow I dealt with quite regularly when the Farm Practices Protection Act was being reviewed. I sent Mr Ulrich Ruegger a copy. Mr Ruegger came to me and said that he doesn't believe in any pesticides, he doesn't believe in any kind of artificial things in farm operations. There's room for those kinds of producers. In fact, one of the things the minister said which I agree with, and all the producer groups concerned, is that we must have the highest quality product when we're talking about the export market. I know it's well recognized, and the export market is some $5 billion and growing annually. In fact, it's one of the faster-growing sectors in our economy.

A couple of other local operators come to mind. I deal with a lot of constituents in the agricultural sector. Arnot Wotten, who is well known as a drover in the area but also a producer of cattle, often calls me and says, "Now, what's the government doing about this Farm Practices Protection Act?" I've shared the bill with him. It's quite a small bill. It's very, very important, quite readable.

To make a few concluding remarks, the preamble here, which I've shared with Ulrich Ruegger, Arnot Wotten and many people in my riding, says, "It is desirable to conserve, protect and encourage the development and improvement of agricultural lands for the production of food...." I think everyone here would agree with that, so I expect this bill to have unanimous support.

Our minister has worked so hard to work with the farm community to make sure it addresses the issues of the day. It talks about the intensive operation situation in cattle and chicken operations. It addresses the effectiveness of producing high-quality foods. In the definition section on page 1, it talks about "agricultural operation." It means "an agricultural, aquacultural, horticultural or silvicultural operation that is carried on in the expectation of gain or reward." That broadens the definition of the agricultural operation to be inclusive of those persons who may have a small sawmill operation, a maple syrup operation, diversifying their operation to be competitive in the world economy.

Then it goes on to define more clearly, as the minister said, the definition of "disturbance," what constitutes these nuisance bylaws, the municipal bylaws. I was a municipal councillor in Clarington and indeed on regional council in Durham region. As growth encroaches on agricultural land, these nuisance issues of noise, odour and smell do emerge. What is the long-practising farm operation to do with the gradual migration of city folk who are less tolerant of those things? They need protection. Our minister has listened, and the definition of "disturbance" has now been expanded. It means issues of "odour, dust, flies, light, smoke, noise and vibration" that could constitute a nuisance.

"Agricultural operation," again, the definition section makes it very clear, and I think persons who are moving to the rural sector for the high quality of life have to recognize that the food basket not only of this province but of the country and indeed perhaps the world is the agricultural sector. Everything we drink and eat has to be grown somewhere, and our population in Ontario is one of the highest producing sectors in the whole economy.

The bill goes on to define a few other aspects of what is not liable, and it defines very clearly what is liable. There is no compromise when it comes to this farm stewardship issue. The environment and any of those other issues around that are not exposed to risk in this bill, and it is very clearly outlined in here.

In my final, concluding remarks, I have to say I'm anxious to hear how the opposition responds to this bill. I thank the minister again for allowing me to have time to speak on it and to recognize formally in this House many of the people I work hard, as the minister and other members do, to represent here at Queen's Park. Indeed their concerns are heard. Indeed this minister has recognized many of those concerns.

My final remark has to be a little more light-hearted. I go back to an important story to me. I go back to Garnet Rickard, who serves as a great model for me. He was just a wise farmer, a man wise from working on the earth and

producing the food he ate. He said to me, "There's not too much that falls beyond the span of an apple tree." If you think about it, if each of us stays close to the source of our very existence, agriculture is self-sustaining, where the land itself and the water and the soil are the factory. They have the highest respect for that, and it goes on to produce food for us, our family and indeed the province. To me, I always look at the definition of a farmer as a person who's outstanding in their field.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

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Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): I'd just like to make a few comments on what the minister and others from the governing party have said.

I realize that many changes have to come to protect agriculture and the farm operations and to help municipalities in their municipal and official plans. I know all this from my municipal days, that if we're going to survive here in Ontario, we have to add value to what we grow. But I can't understand some of the doubletalk that I've heard here tonight from a government that would let the agricultural budget deteriorate by 43% and pretend to care so much about agriculture.

In my days, I've had many farmers in my constituency office. They had so much money to put into a project and the bank would give them so much, and they'd just need a little bit to bridge that gap and they're away and adding value to what they grow. I think the government is overlooking something to let the agricultural budget not have a little pot of money to assist in those projects.

I know we all want to protect our agricultural land, and we have to, if we're going to live here. I know you've got the best asset in the farmers because they're good farmers. A good agricultural person will do everything he can to protect that land, because much of that has been handed down from generation to generation. There are many in Ontario and beyond looking to buy prime agricultural land not only because they think that's the future for Ontario but they're looking at the export market, which is going to be a very valuable asset to the people of Ontario.

Mr Wildman: I was really impressed with the tour of Durham East that was given to us by the member who just spoke. I'm sure that all of his farm constituents whom he named will be happy to receive the Hansard when he sends it out.

I listened carefully, as carefully as the member for London South, to the remarks of the minister. I am a little bit concerned that while we have before us a piece of legislation that purports to respond to the concerns of the farm community, and which I think does to a large extent, the minister, who as member for the united counties and South Grenville on this side of the House railed against the fact that the proportion of the total provincial budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food was declining, has presided over the most drastic decline in history of the budget in relation to the total budget of the province; and how a minister who also has as part of his responsibilities rural affairs and who says he is concerned about representing the rural communities, could sit by and see this government destroy a number of rural constituencies in this Legislature by amalgamations, and then move further to amalgamate large school boards so that we have in his own area the so-called alphabet soup board, the Lanark, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, Prescott-Russell and whatever board that is so large that everybody thinks it is impossible to —

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The time has expired.

Mr Wildman: This is a man who purports to represent rural Ontario, when he lets his government run roughshod over the concerns of —

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired.

Mr Jack Carroll (Chatham-Kent): I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments in support of the minister who introduced Bill 146.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): Don't be too hard on him, Jack.

Mr Carroll: No, I'll take it easy. I'm not so sure what Bill 146 has to do with education. I must have been reading a different version of the bill, I guess, than the member.

Mr Wildman: You try and compartmentalize everything.

Mr Carroll: Anyway, the minister spoke about my riding of Chatham-Kent and he spoke about our new ethanol plant. I was glad to hear him make reference to that. It's a wonderful new industry, creating new jobs in the agrifood industry.

You know, Bill 146 does a few things for us. It respects the rights of both the urban and the agricultural interests. It protects the environment, but it lays out for us in fairly plain terms how important it is that we promote agriculture and agrifood growth in Ontario. There is nowhere in all of the industries available to us where we have more potential for good things and for growth than we do in agrifood and the agricultural industry.

I look at my small area of Chatham-Kent. Mind you, while it may be small, it is also probably the finest agricultural area in Ontario. But in addition to our ethanol plant and the new industries surrounding ethanol, we also have revitalized the sugar beet industry that disappeared years ago because Ontario was not competitive in the sugar beet industry. We've seen that revived under the auspices of our government.

We also have the beginnings of a wonderful hemp industry. There's a lot of great qualities that the hemp product has. The minister's been very supportive of that industry. We see it starting down in our area.

All in all, Bill 146 recognizes how important agriculture and the agrifood industry is to our province. Our minister has done a great job of promoting the benefits of the agrifood and agriculture industry and we're very pleased with Bill 146.

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): I'll make some brief comments; I'm going to comment at length about this bill shortly. To the member for Durham East, who said he didn't have enough time, I remind you that you're the government that changed the rules and shortened debating

time by 30 minutes for yourself and for us in the opposition.

I want to comment to the minister on what he mentioned about environmental standards. We agree that the past bill, future bills and indeed this one should protect environmental standards. We don't want the broader public to think anything else, other than the fact that we want to protect our environment, through this and any other piece of legislation. We also need to allow the farmers to go about their business of creating jobs, wealth and food for our province, and indeed we will always strive for that.

Minister, you said you wanted this bill to be law by the end of the year. We will assist you in the passage of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you have two minutes.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: I want to thank all my colleagues who participated, my colleagues from Cornwall, Algoma, Chatham-Kent and Essex-Kent.

I always find it interesting when the member for Algoma, who has been around here for a long time, seems to forget that for five years, while his government had the opportunity of running this province, they put us in debt by $50 billion of additional debt — $50 billion. Besides that, they closed down two of our agricultural colleges — two out of five. Do you remember that? How do you dare accuse us after what you did to this province? You come back and find fault with what we're doing? I do not understand that in any way, shape or form.

I've been very close to the agricultural community and I make it a point to travel. I went down to the Niagara area on Friday last, where the grape and wine festival is beginning. You know the doom and gloom that you preached and the Liberals provincially preached whenever the free trade deal was coming. Travel to Niagara these days and see what's going on there. A very positive grape and wine industry.

Mr Crozier: Come down to Essex county and try some of our wine too.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: The member from Essex there, we supported the ethanol industry with dollars. Your leader, when you were the government, spoke against the ethanol industry.

Mr Hoy: You cut the funding.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: How do you have the audacity of finding fault with a government that is supporting what you couldn't support and is very positive for agriculture? We have $5.3 billion of annual exports — better than you could ever claim — and the exports from Ontario's agri-food are rising. I'm very proud of that.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her chambers.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

Bill 156, An Act to amend certain statutes with respect to the Regional Municipality of Sudbury / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant certaines lois en ce qui concerne la municipalité régionale de Sudbury.

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FARMING AND FOOD PRODUCTION PROTECTION ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'AGRICULTURE ET DE LA PRODUCTION AGRICOLE

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Cleary: It is a pleasure to rise and make a few comments on Bill 146 —

The Deputy Speaker: Before you start, do you plan to split the time?

Mr Cleary Yes. It is a pleasure to rise and make a few comments on Bill 146, An Act to protect Farming and Food Production. I'd like to split my time with my colleague from Essex-Kent.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Cleary: As all members know, the goal of the bill is to extend the powers and jurisdictions of the existing Farm Practices Protection Board, and in expanding the powers, the government wants to rename the board to include the word "normal," making the new name the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board. My reaction and the reaction I've heard from many farmers, including several I spoke to at the plowing match last week, is that the overall premise of the bill is a positive step for agriculture and food production in Ontario.

The bill should serve to protect farmers from nuisance lawsuits and restrictive bylaws while also ensuring that farm practices and the results of operating a farm are kept within reasonable limits. This is important because each year about 600 complaints are lodged against farm operations due to dust, noise and smell.

We have to remember that only a few short years ago things were much different in the agricultural community. Every farm had a farm family, and we weren't stuck with the corn dryers, feedlots and all that goes with farming now where one farmer on a concession road is probably operating the whole farm. Why are farmers doing this? To provide safe, economical, high-quality food for the people of Ontario and to export and to add value and create jobs.

For years those complaints about farm practices have turned to the Farm Practices Protection Board to rule on the appropriateness or even environmental and safety concerns arising from farm operations. Under Bill 146 the board will still do that, but in addition to ruling on noise, dust and smells, the board will also have the authority to

rule on other farm outcomes — smoke, flies, vibrations and lights.

Focusing on the decision to include lights, meaning lights from late-night harvesting or commodity transportation trucks or even greenhouses, shows what this bill is trying to do. Bill 146 has also attempted to update the reality of farming in today's Ontario. For example, since some farmers are using greenhouses, the usage should now be reflected as a normal farm practice.

Further, as different and more innovative farm techniques and processes are introduced, this bill should leave room for the farm practices board to make evaluations on those new practices in terms of the impact on the environment and the community at large. There are lots of times that environmental issues that should be dealt with by the Ministry of Environment fall at the doorstep of agriculture. It seems every year we have new crops being grown, so we have to be prepared for those results of innovation.

There are definitely some positive aspects to this bill: Allowing farmers to do their job to the best of their ability while still protecting neighbours and municipalities is a good thing. But there are several concerns with the bill. First and foremost, some farmers have said they don't think the minister has consulted enough with them on the contents of this bill, that the bill was pretty much launched in June without their knowing what was going to be in it. They feel that the meetings held last winter in only eight selected communities were not sufficient to gather their concerns. Some farmers have expressed concern that the minister may not have consulted enough on what actually constitutes a normal farm operation. I know many of the large farm groups have done their best to come up with a bill that should be satisfactory, but some individual farmers still say they would like to have a chance to comment.

On the other side of the fence, I have also heard from rural residents who don't run farms, and they have said that the legislation does not address their concerns. People like Diane Lalonde, Francis Hogan, Anita Frayne and Lawrence Hogan of the organization called PROTECT have contacted me with their concerns about farm operations.

There are also concerns that the wee change the minister is making to the name of the board, just adding the word "normal," will result in little unnecessary expense, things like printing new letterhead and business cards.

Now, perhaps more than ever, because the face of the province, municipal responsibilities and municipal boundaries are all drastically changing, it is essential that the people of Ontario have the opportunity to comment on what the government is doing. I say this because I know first hand that not all the people of Ontario are happy; it doesn't matter what you do. To comment specifically on agriculture, all farmers are not happy with the direction and the policies the agriculture ministry has implemented over the past two years.

Let me be frank. The current minister has done a lot of damage to rural Ontario: slashed the budget by 43%; closed field offices in Alexandria, Cayuga, Waterloo, Plantagenet, Embrun, Matheson, to name a few; eliminated services in the field; closed the Brighton veterinary college and wiped out other lab services and research programs; reduced support for agricultural colleges; cancelled the dairy audit program, reduced the municipal outlet drainage program, cut Foodland Ontario promotions, cancelled the Niagara tender fruit lands program, and that is only a partial list of cuts.

Let me be clear: Although the bill before us right now, Bill 146, may be a good thing for farmers, and I think it is, this is not to say that all farm legislation from this administration has been helpful to farmers. Since taking office just over two years ago, this minister has slashed the ag budget by 43%, and these are figures out of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. The minister has also cut many programs that were very helpful to farmers, which has had a damaging impact on rural Ontario.

As we move forward on this piece of legislation, I suggest that we move with caution and we ensure that it will actually benefit all of rural Ontario, farmers and non-farmers alike, and I'm sure there are lots in the agricultural community who will assist you and look forward to working with you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

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Mr Hoy: I'm pleased to be able to speak on Bill 146 tonight, An Act to protect Farming and Food Production. Speaker, you would know that there have been rule changes and that this allows the government to ram through legislation like Bill 136. Today was the first day of public hearings, and I am on the committee that should be listening to the people tonight who would appear before that committee to speak on Bill 136. But this government, in its zeal to get legislation through quickly, can now introduce two bills per day, so I had to make a decision on where I should be this evening. As agriculture critic for our party, I decided that I must be here to speak to Bill 146.

This bill was a commitment that was made in the Harris revolution document. Indeed, the revolution document said they would do something with regard to farm practices protection.

Here we are going into the third year of the government's mandate and we are only at second reading of what was promised during the election. The Harris government has been quick on legislation to close hospitals, has been quick on legislation to create chaos in our classrooms, and throughout the education system has been quick to amalgamate, but they are very slow in regard to bringing forth something they actually promised in their Common Sense Revolution document, going into the third year of their mandate.

The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has indeed been slow. We had a resolution not so long ago from the member for Huron encouraging the minister to work with farmers and farm organizations. His own member brought forth a resolution urging the minister to speak and talk with farm organizations. Tomorrow there's yet another resolution from the member for Halton North urging the government to recognize the importance of safe

and cost-effective biotechnology and to support well-research science. So you see, the government has been moving slowly, in particular the minister, on agricultural programs.

The minister has been slow to act. His back bench, when he was moving quickly and making cuts to agriculture, said, "Slow down." He completely slowed down.

He was slow on ethanol. The original plan of this government was to cut ethanol funding, and then he was slow on information as to what would happen with that money.

He was slow in regard to the farm tax rebate: $175 million has been taken away from rural communities, and yet they do not know how that money will be replaced. The government talks about a fund of money, but rural municipalities tell me they don't think it's enough money. They think they will be in competition with large cities for those moneys, and the minister has not even made it clear how much of the $175 million lost in the farm tax rebate will be flowing back.

There were many people who attended the plowing match expecting the minister to announce his rural job strategy. He announced in the budget of May that there was a strategy that would provide for jobs for rural Ontarians, and he's slow to deliver on the money, and as I've said, he was slow in bringing forth Bill 146.

But now that it's here, some months ago at my home I was watching a popular television show called This Business of Farming. It's hosted by Ross Daly. I've appeared on the show myself. The minister talked about the need for this bill, the need for change, the changing dynamic of agriculture, the changing dynamic of rural Ontario, and the minister said he was going to consult with the opposition. To date, he hasn't done that. I don't know if he's talked to the third party, the NDP, but he simply has not talked to our caucus and consulted about this bill.

This government likes to pretend that it consults, always open to consultation, and on TV it probably appeared to be a very wise move. People probably believed the minister, that he was going to consult with the opposition, but I tell you, Speaker, he did not. It was a façade.

There is no doubt that agriculture has changed. Agriculture has always been in a state of change. We have museums that show the change in the evolution of agriculture here in Ontario. Some of these museums are quite local, and some of them provide information and are highlighted for the whole of the province.

Yes, agriculture has been changing. It has been changing over the 25 years I've farmed. I can remember yields that now would almost appear to be a failure, so yes, agriculture has changed.

I find it interesting that in the fall of 1984 the current minister voted against right-to-farm legislation. It was a private member's bill in the name of Mr Jack Riddell and the bill contained a section allowing the minister guidelines on normal farm practices. This section was to provide a mechanism to determine what was normal and what was abnormal. In 1984 Jack Riddell recognized the need for legislation such as this, but the current minister, Mr Villeneuve, was opposed to this, to giving the minister supreme powers to dictate how farmers should operate their business. Mr Villeneuve said, "Section 3 of the bill concerns me. It gives the minister absolute power over all of agriculture, which should not occur."

Interestingly enough, the minister now believes this provision should be added under his legislation. He likes it in his legislation, but not in anyone else's; not one with the foresight in 1984 to bring about what was then called right-to-farm legislation.

Section 10 of this bill allows the minister to unilaterally define the nature of farm operations that qualify under the earlier general definition of normal farm practices, including additional crops and activities, and limits expansions or clarification of activities described within the definitions. The existing legislation does not have this ability of the minister to specifically define agricultural practices, but Noble Villeneuve now feels he must give himself the kinds of powers he opposed when he was in opposition.

From the compendium notes to the bill: "The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs may issue directives in relation to agricultural operations or normal farm practices, or may adopt in whole or in part any directives, guidelines or policy statements prescribed under other pieces of legislation or by other ministries. Any decision made by the farm practices protection board must be consistent with the prescribed directives and statements. This provision should ensure that other government priorities and policies are maintained and respected."

You see that the minister is going to have his hand, through section 10, on the policy-making in agriculture, something that in 1984 he was opposed to.

I'm not one to very often, in fact very, very rarely, quote Brian Mulroney, but Brian Mulroney did say one thing that I think is apropos, and actually I've quoted this particular line on many occasions. It is the only line from Brian Mulroney I do quote, and that is that, "Only a donkey would not change his mind." So I'm pleased the minister has had a change of heart and sees the full wisdom of farm practices protection. Farmers have been asking for stronger protection, and changes within this industry such as those I've mentioned call for a new act.

Farms are increasing in size. Producers are specializing in their choice of what commodity they want to specialize in. Greenhouses is one of those areas. It's an expanding agriculture component here in Ontario. I know the minister has visited the greenhouses in southern Ontario. I too have visited those sites. I think he'll agree it's marvellous to see tomato plants, the vines, growing some 25- and 30-feet long, coming forth from a small site on the floor, a cement floor.

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I'm reminded of a story when some European friends dropped into my farm. they came by and visited the farm. Our farm was a cash crop operation and they said: "Where are your chickens? Where are your hogs? Where are your cows?" I said, "Well, agriculture here in Ontario has changed dramatically, perhaps over the last 50 years more so than any other time." I drove them four or five

miles down the road and showed them a turkey farm and they were amazed at the size of the whole complex.

That wasn't so many years ago, but actually that turkey farm now would be considered very small. Five hundred-acre holdings at one time were considered to be large farms, but now we have many producers working thousands and thousands of acres and they have invested huge sums of money.

The investment in agriculture is indeed large and the risk is high. We know that market fluctuations exist and can make or break farm operations. We know the weather can wreak havoc on a farm. Just a few minutes of hail can take a beautiful farm and bring it almost to ruin, and on some occasions, particularly in the fruit industry, they don't come back from that; the particular trees will die. We need such strong safety nets to help farmers out through these risks they face.

Most farmers are good stewards of the land. After all, the land, the water and the air are important to their livelihood. Most farmers are indeed good stewards of the land and most farmers respect their neighbours, whether they be farm or non-farm. They respect that they live across the road, down the concession, and they respect that they are living in rural Ontario.

An example of this might be that some time ago farmers began to store more and more grains on their farms. As a matter of fact, it was encouraged. It was part of a marketing plan to store more and more of one's grains on the farms and, after that, farmers decided to dry more and more grains on their farms. With the technology that existed then, there were those who said that these grain dryers in particular were very loud, so farmers worked hard to satisfy their neighbours, farm and non-farm, by putting up barriers to block the sound. Then, as technology changed, they bought centrifugal fans and other types of drying systems that reduced noise.

Farmers have always tried to appease their neighbours. They've always tried to do what is best for the whole community and, I might add, this was done at some cost. Shifting from one type of grain drying or any other type of facility like it to another always costs money.

But in any society or within any one group within that society there may be a few who disregard those around them and the rights of those around them, and that is why we as legislators must bring forth law, regulation and guidelines, and for many situations, not just with agriculture but other situations. Examples could be those who choose to drive too fast on our highways, and we have laws for that; those who pass school buses when the lights are flashing, and we have laws for that.

Mr Crozier: We need stiffer laws.

Mr Hoy: We need stiffer laws for that and I've given the government some ideas on how to do that.

We need to develop a new Farming and Food Production Protection Act to meet the needs of an industry that is ever changing and one that I expect will continue to change, to meet the needs of new technologies and to meet the needs of the new demographics in rural Ontario.

The number of new farm operators in my immediate area, those new to the business in the last few years, is very small. I can recall a gentleman being in a building where there was a large crowd, and he looked around and after a bit he came to me and he said, "There are only two new young farmers in this whole crowd of agricultural entrepreneurs." There were only two. Further to that he said, "There are only two who don't have an off-farm job." There were only two. My point is that there are few new young farmers coming into agriculture, and at least in my vicinity that holds true.

We have an aging population within our farm community, and yearly there are farmers in Ontario who seek out a retirement. In the fact that we don't have new farmers coming along, it is other farmers that are buying out their operations or renting them. Thus, farms are getting bigger and bigger.

As those retiring farmers decide to stay on the farm a few years but eventually many of them move into a more urban setting, they actually seem to be trading places with the urban people. The urban people will come out and buy the retired farmer's home. The expanding farm had no need for that home; they had a home. They were just simply buying more farm operations. So now we have a situation with an aging farm population and many more urban people moving into rural ridings.

Of course, municipalities have told me that with the downloading the government is anticipating and the lack of clear definition of how the trade in downloading will occur monetarily, they believe they are going to have to go into a mode where they will provide more severances in the rural community, and now we will have, I expect, more urban and small urban communities shifting their populations into the rural area.

I was at a meeting where there was a group of wardens. They were concerned about the government's actions on downloading and property taxes. They said their tax rates could increase by 60% to 70%. You can see the pressure on local councils to look for revenues to offset tax increases of 60% and 70%. There were some wardens who said the tax increases may only be 40% or 35%. But can you imagine 60% and 70% and the pressure on municipalities and their councils to raise moneys to provide the services within their community?

We need to address legitimate complaints regarding farm practices, but we also must allow for normal farm practices to take place. We need to develop a dispute-resolution process to deal with those legitimate complaints and with those that are frivolous. There are occasions when personalities intervene into situations and it's difficult to resolve what is occurring. So we need a dispute resolution for both legitimate complaints and complaints that might be deemed to be frivolous.

This act has been expanded to include and bring about some help to the farm community in the issuance of complaints. It has been expanded to include odour, noise, dust, light, smoke and vibration. It is a required change and it is a welcome change.

I want to speak briefly about nutrient management plans. They are not part of the act, but as far as agriculture goes, they are something we need to discuss further and expand on. When I was at the International Plowing Match just recently, I stopped by the OMAFRA display and picked up a nutrient management book.

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Mr Crozier: Did you have to pay for it?

Mr Hoy: The member for Essex South asked, did I have to pay for it. This particular book I did not have to pay for. I assume the reason is because it's put out by both the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. I don't know, but it's possible that the minister can't attach a user fee to something that the federal government is also involved in. I'm not certain of that, but to me that would make some sense.

In any regard, I picked up this book, which was given out freely to anyone who wanted it, and I bumped into the cash register right beside it. The farmers were telling me they could not believe that the OMAFRA site, for the first time in history at the International Plowing Match, had a cash register sitting on the desk for those who wanted to get information on agricultural issues. I guess that would be a user fee. To me, that's a user fee, and a user fee is something that the Premier of Ontario called a tax. The government wants to collect, initially, $1 million in user fees from the farm community.

For the people in northern Ontario who don't have the capability to access the Internet, their only other alternative is to get publications like the one I hold in my hand. So they are penalized; they have to pay for it. They can't use the Internet because they don't have the capability. Many areas have party lines and it's not feasible, it's not there, so they rely on this exclusively.

When I had the opportunity to look at this book, and I'm not going to read it all, there is some valuable information in it in regard to nutrient management. I just want to quote: "Nutrients retained on your farm reduce both the risk of damage to the environment and the cost of what might otherwise have been spent on fertilizers." It sounds like good information. I think the minister and the ministry should embark on a plan to enhance nutrient management; to have persons made more aware of the opportunities that exist; to provide advice, and certainly I would hope at no cost, to the farmers of Ontario to assist them. Let's not have a cash register sitting at OMAFRA. I think we must return to this issue of nutrient management at some point in time.

The new act will address changing farms, technology, demographics, and we need this act because we have a change in local governance.

Mr Wildman: Who brought that on?

Mr Hoy: The member asked who brought that on. The Mike Harris government brought that on.

The rural and urban mix is what many people refer to as amalgamation. Here in Ontario, and particularly within my riding of Essex-Kent, the county of Kent has been amalgamated into one municipality. A commissioner was brought in and said, "This is what will happen to what was formerly known as Chatham and the county of Kent." It's interesting to note that the commissioner gave the people two options as to what they could choose, and only one municipality in 22 picked the option that the commissioner was offering in Kent county.

What we had was a governance that at one time could be described as rural and another governance that one could describe as urban, and now we have a governance that is a combination of both. My riding, across both Essex and Kent counties, is about 90 miles long and it doesn't have a population of more than 4,500 people centred in any one village or town. Clearly there are parts of my riding in Kent county that have populations of less than 4,500 people, and it diminishes from there as we get into the farther reaches of the rural community, but now they are put together with a larger municipality.

Rural people are worried and concerned about this amalgamation. They fear that the urban population, which quite clearly has the voting power and has more people who are bending their ear, will bring about a problem in regard to frivolous complaints to Bill 146. Also, they are fearful that over time even those small towns and villages will have the opportunity, potentially, to elect members of council. They're worried that those who live out in the farther reaches of the rural community will not have an opportunity to sit on local council because of the concentration of voters, even within a ward system. There's a concern in rural Ontario about what is commonly known as the rural-urban mix and amalgamation.

Bill 146 is not as extensive as an OFA model that was provided to the minister. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, in its wisdom, showed the minister a model for Bill 146. In regard to definitions, the OFA provided an expanded view, in most cases, of what the minister has put within Bill 146.

For example, the OFA mentions bird-bangers. I remember that not so long ago there was a debate, and a rather heated debate, about the use of bird-bangers. They are required to keep birds from migrating into fruit crops in particular and are designed to scare them away. The history of this is interesting in that while the urban people or those who came from an urban setting into a rural community found these to be disruptive, the farming community tried to assist. The farmers would change the direction of these noisemakers or, as technology changed and capabilities changed, they had these loud noises going off in rotation. So the farm community has always responded to complaints by others, and the OFA mentioned these particular devices.

The OFA model provides an extensive definition of "farmer," something I think the minister could have taken more notice of. Past history has had us believe that the definition of "farmer" could be tied to one's gross income, but in this case I'm not certain that gross income provides for a clear definition of "farmer" within an act that will be imparted to a quasi-judicial board. I think it might be wise for the minister to have a second look at the definition of "farmer."

2020

Within its bill, the OFA definition of "normal farm practices" included the wording "land zoned for agriculture." I know that when people are talking about certain disruptions or perceived disruptions in the agricultural community, the immediate response is, "It's zoned agricultural; therefore, these activities can indeed take place," notwithstanding that the activity must be a normal farm practice, but I think by stating that the land was zoned agricultural provides a certain comfort level to all parties. I've had urban persons say: "Of course, he or she can do that on that piece of land. It's zoned agricultural." They understand that. Of course, the agricultural community understands that all too well.

The major difference in the makeup of the board between the minister's bill and the OFA model is centred around membership. The federation of agriculture would like and suggests that six members be selected by the minister from a list of names nominated by farm organizations in the province. There are other differences between the two models, but this is the most striking. The OFA did not say that they had to come from within their organization. They said nominated persons should come from within farm organizations, and I think that makes good sense. It would be an excellent idea to have persons who understand the issues nominated from the farm community and put forth by farm organizations. That doesn't preclude the fact that the minister could make other appointments from maybe a broader spectrum; perhaps from within the range of municipalities, someone with experience at the municipal level, as a suggestion.

Thus the difference in the number of board members may not be all that significant, but how they are selected could be very important. The differences between the two bills on numbers of persons on the board would also affect the suggestion of quorum that the OFA had put forth. But I think those differences of quorum etc can be worked out. I think the significant situation here is who will be on that board.

The Farm Practices Protection Board will decide what is normal. That's their first obligation. They will decide what is normal farm practice and we will need informed persons to know what is normal and what is abnormal. Clearly we cannot have anyone on that board who is confused as to what is normal.

Once we've decided what is a normal farm practice, we have the issue of compliance. We need to have strong compliance once a decision is made by this board. I want to talk about a situation that occurred in my riding. We had an individual who deemed in his mind that it would be proper to burn manure. He burned manure. This created an odour that I have to say I've never been around. It was awful, apparently. This situation occurred and the prevailing winds took this smoke, first of all, and the odour towards his neighbours. They suffered from sore throat, sore eyes. It was taken to the board and was deemed not to be a normal farm practice; that's what the board said. Herein lies a greater problem.

The Ministry of Environment has been investigating and trying to cease this burning of manure for almost two years. We have a situation where the board has said, "This is not normal," and the people who were complainants had a valid case, and we don't have any enforcement. Maybe part of that is because in my region the Ministry of Environment has been slashed. I know the people I talked to in regard to this case are gone; they're not there any more. The municipality got involved, their lawyer got involved. The MOE was involved, but to date nothing has happened.

This isn't the only case within my riding. It might be the most graphic in terms of the nuisance and it may be one that is not likely to occur again in Ontario. But in other situations in my riding when people call the Ministry of Environment to look into cases, they either don't do it at all or they're very slow and the occurrence of the nuisance has ceased. The ministry arrives too late and what was occurring has now passed.

If we're going to have a situation where rural and urban residents can live in harmony, and in most cases they do, and we have a board that says, "This is not normal," then we have to have compliance and enforcement. The board can dismiss a case if it is normal farm practice. The board can order farmers to cease a practice if it is not normal. The board can order the farmer to modify the situation. I think this is a good component of what the board may order. It may be that the farmer or farm in question really didn't realize that they were causing such a great nuisance. It may be that the farm did not understand that this was wrong. With new technologies comes a new definition of what is normal. It could be that the farmer did not understand that what he was doing was causing someone else some grief. So I think it's good that the board can ask the farmer to modify.

Bill 146 states, "No municipal bylaw applies to restrict a normal farm practice carried on as part of an agricultural operation." This is something that the broader community has been grappling with for some time. Municipal bylaw changes are occurring throughout Ontario in regard to situations that exist. The bill says, "No municipal bylaw applies to restrict a normal farm practice carried on as part of an agricultural operation." Municipalities have had requests for such bylaws, so now we have something in place that can adjudicate and have experts provide information on what is normal. I think that because of the rural-urban mix in the amalgamations that are going on, this board is going to be very busy as municipalities try to seek out from the government, from this board, what is normal.

I know in Kent county there are 49 working groups looking at all manner of things, including bylaws. I think the request for information on what is normal is going to be coming towards the government at a rapid pace and in large degree — quantities of requests.

2030

Notice of hearing: It states within the bill that one who is not a party to the hearing may be given notice. Those living in a municipality may not have a direct interest in

what is occurring in the far southwest corner, but to the whole of the municipality, now that we've made it one municipality — not 21, but one — will want to know what is occurring in a particular ward that would affect the whole of the municipality.

There was a situation at one time where councillors at the local level dealt with a great many things and that was rather localized. Surely they had bylaws to look after and respect the environment and whatever other manner of legislation the Ontario government had. There's an effort here to make everyone aware that a hearing is being held.

What we have here is a situation where there may be a complaint in the southwest corner of a municipality, just to use an example, and there is going to be a bylaw change that affects the whole of the municipality, and it may be unique to one area. It may never have the opportunity for occurrence elsewhere.

The government and the ministers talked about an awareness campaign. We know that hasn't started yet. This is designed to notify those in the rural communities of what rural life may be, I think, through what I've read from the minister, who is looking for partners in this exercise, and I expect that those partners will be willing to take part.

Perhaps more important is the government's role to tell the people what the laws are and what the situations are that exist within Ontario. Perhaps it is the government's role to provide those informations. After all, it is their act. It is their board. It is their right to allow appeals to the board. As we talk about appeals, let me say that in a great many pieces of legislation this government has brought forth, there is no right of appeal. I am pleased to see that in this act there is an allowance for appeals. That is very good.

I want to spend a moment talking about the agricultural cuts that have occurred here in Ontario. We've had cuts to agriculture of $75 million. In the last budget the minister said he had added $5 million back in, and that's correct, so instead of having a cut of $81 million, we're looking at $75 million or $76 million. But then he went on to say, later in the day and in days to come, that he wanted to have user fees of at least $1 million, and that was just the beginning.

I remind the members that the Premier of this province said a user fee is simply a tax. Mike Harris said that a user fee is simply a tax. Now there are user fees for such things as information for beginning, part-time farmers. I was talking about the fact that there seemed to be no new farmers. Here the government is saying, "Well, if you're interested in this and you want to assist us in creating jobs for the province and you want to assist us in increasing those exports and you want to increase the tax base within your local community and you want information on being a beginning farmer, by Jove you can have it but it's going to cost you."

Farmers want to be able to manage those risks that I mentioned before. They want to be able to manage commodity markets, the times of year to sell, and all other matters that pertain to any business. If the government truly wants the agricultural community to thrive, and to help them increase exports and create jobs, why on earth would they charge farmers for a guide to farm money matters? They decided, "We're going to charge you now." Agricultural software is now being charged for and it is at a higher price — not only for publications that are to help farmers in one's mind, how to do one's business, but there are also charges for such things that come under what would be deemed as a safety feature. The government is going to charge for a video on silo safety. They're everywhere with charges now. It doesn't matter if you're trying to increase your knowledge of agriculture. It doesn't matter if you want to protect yourself against injury, maybe even death. The government says, "We're going to charge you for it."

I think that many members in this House would be surprised to know that the largest crop in Ontario is actually forage. Others might have picked corn, soybeans, wheat, maybe others would have picked tomatoes, others might have picked something else, but that is the largest crop in Ontario. The soil and crop publications the government used to provide at no cost are now being charged for. They're charging throughout for the publications that they used to put forth —

At the plowing match people were coming to me, because I was there every day, and they said, "Can you believe this cash register at the desk of the OMAFRA building?" They were going around, imitating that commercial we used to see on TV, going "ker-ching, ker-ching," and they knew that the minister must have been smiling, because I would presume the cash register was ringing or he would have gotten rid of it. It was an amazing thing to see that there.

Interjections.

Mr Hoy: We must have hit a nerve, because all of a sudden the members have woken up. I'm glad to see they're awake. I'm glad to see they're listening. It's almost like they've had a cold drink of water on a sore tooth or something over there.

I also want to talk about what is happening in rural Ontario as it pertains to highways. This government has downloaded on to municipalities and rural Ontario in the main what was known as provincial highways to the tune of $225 million. I was really struck when the minister got up and said they don't have any provincial significance. What a slap in the face of rural Ontario to tell them that the roads they drive daily are not of provincial significance. Can you imagine?

The minister, on that side of the House, said that. He probably didn't give it enough thought, that the produce the Minister of Agriculture is so proud of — and I am as well — moves across these roads every day to the 400-series highways and is brought here to Toronto and other sites in Ontario for processing, distribution, sales, and they are finally consumed by the people of Ontario. He says they are not of provincial significance.

The rural people I talk to are very concerned. As a matter of fact, they came to me and said, "Pat, when do you think that these roads will turn to gravel roads and

will no longer have the nice hard top that is on them?" They're concerned about that. They are very concerned about the $225 million that is missing, they're worried about the $175 million from the farm tax rebate and they're worried about the $667 million of municipal support grants that are also missing. This is rural Ontario. I have those same concerns as a constituent in my riding.

2040

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Questions or comments?

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I want to acknowledge with thanks the member for Essex-Kent for his comments with respect to this bill. I think he has provided some enlightenment for a lot of people who live in the cities, like myself, who are unfamiliar with what is considered normal farm practices. We acknowledge the importance of production by farmers in our communities because, even though we may not be involved in farming activities, we certainly all enjoy eating the products of their labours.

I'm not really too familiar with the production of agricultural crops, the production of eggs, cream and milk and many of the other things that are referred to in this bill. But we know that some of the things that are considered, by definition in this bill, as normal farm practices are going to be adjudicated by what is referred to as a Normal Farm Practices Protection Board. That is where I have some concern about what this government's agenda is. We've seen time and time again that this is a government that's moving too far, too fast, oftentimes in the wrong direction.

Where is this board going to get the resources to make some of these adjudications? That's what my concern is. I want to make sure they have the resources to make those adjudications. The member says that the board is going to be busy; they're going to need that and we want to ensure that farmers aren't going to be subject to user fees in order to do this.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: I want to thank my colleagues from Cornwall and Essex-Kent for their contributions. They leave me a little puzzled because they were in favour, but I wonder if they really are in favour. They have been known to flip and flop a bit in the past. I found it interesting that both my colleagues were at the OMAFRA booth at the plowing match and that they took note of the excellent literature that was there. I walked by a tent at the plowing match and it had Liberal T-shirts for sale. That's basically all they had.

Mr Hoy: They were not for sale.

Mr Crozier: They were not for sale.

Mr Hoy: You have it all wrong.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: "They were not for sale." There's the old Liberal giveaway again and again. The farm tax rebate: I found it interesting that the honourable member commented on that, because for all of the years of the Liberal reign I think the farm tax rebate got more farmers against the Liberal Party than any other. We now know where we're going with the farm tax rebate. The farm land and buildings are taxed at 25%, the rural residence and one acre at 100%, and the government of Ontario will be reinvesting in those municipalities.

Again, he spoke of ethanol. I want to remind him that when Lyn McLeod was the Minister of Energy, I wrote to her and asked her to support the ethanol industry and Lyn McLeod said, "No, it's not economical." I still have that correspondence.

Consultation: We consulted with 850 farmers and you were certainly welcome to make your presentation if you so desired.

Mr Crozier: It's a pleasure for me to respond to the comments from my colleagues from Cornwall and from Essex-Kent. I think they did a fine job in pointing out some of the things where this government isn't necessarily the friend of agriculture. But they pointed out that we support this bill and I am pleased that they did. If we weren't under these draconian rules we have now, I would have had the opportunity to get up for 30 minutes this evening and extol the virtues of Essex county.

In that vein, I only have about a minute and 20 seconds. In Essex county we have over 6,000 jobs that are created through agriculture and we're proud of it: $40 million in wages. I know you'd be interested to know the economic contribution made in Essex county alone, which happens to be greater than the three Atlantic provinces: field crops, $92.7 million in Essex county; processing vegetables, $18.7 million; fresh vegetables $16.6 million —

Hon Mr Villeneuve: Are you supporting me on this? Are you supporting the bill?

Mr Crozier: If you would have listened to me about 15 seconds ago, I said I'm proud we are — fresh vegetables, $16.6 million; fruit, $7.8 million; greenhouse crops, $85 million. We have the fastest-growing, largest greenhouse area in North America. We're proud of it and it's right there in Essex county. We know what agriculture contributes to this province. We'd appreciate it if you'd just give us those highways back so we can get our products out to the rest of Ontario.

Mr Len Wood: I wanted to have an opportunity to ask a question of the Minister of Agriculture as to the reasons why he wanted to bring forward this bill so quickly and get it into law, or get it into second reading, before the dumping and downloading that is taking place.

I know the member commented on this briefly, but it's something we might hear more about. Why would they want to eliminate a lot of rural politicians at the municipal level and get this bill through? There would be less voice out in those areas while they are having to pay the extra cost of everything that Mike Harris is dumping and downloading on to the people in rural and urban Ontario.

I've learned a lot from this discussion that's going on today. Originally being the son of a farmer in Perth county, I know a little bit about farming. There are concerns out there in the farming community as the urban areas move into those areas. I still have a sister and some cousins who are involved in farming. But there is a concern out there that the Mike Harris government is moving too fast, moving in the wrong direction and they're hurting a lot of people in Ontario.

The concern is when you take away the rural voice through restructuring and dumping and downloading. Chatham-Kent is a good example, where they've eliminated all the rural voices that used to be in that particular county. All the other counties are going to end up with the same thing. I'm sure that Perth county is concerned that the rural voice is being lost there as well. I have relatives and friends in those areas who have been speaking to me about their concerns, which are being talked about here today. I'm looking forward to further debate from other people.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Essex-Kent has two minutes to respond.

2050

Mr Hoy: I appreciate the comments of the members over the last few moments. I want to remind the minister that we supported ethanol. The federal government provided many dollars towards ethanol. They have an ethanol plan for all of Canada. One should remember that.

We also, as a government, provided money to young farmers at one time to give them a boost, to give them help. You know it's a capital-intensive business. As a matter of fact, I've heard you say that it costs a lot to get into farming and maintain a farm. You're right, and it is big business.

I just want to spend one more moment to try and have members opposite understand what the rural community is feeling as far as downloading goes. I mentioned some other concerns: highways, municipal support grants, farm tax rebate. Policing is another one.

The Solicitor General at one time called estimates put forth for Kent county of $220 per household as extreme. He said: "That's extreme. It's not going to happen. That's way out of sight." Indeed it is a lot of money, but at the end of the day, when it came forward, it was more than even that; it was more than $220 per household. The original estimates are now $272.51 per household.

I think the government needs to recognize more fully the role that rural Ontario plays and the capabilities they have to maintain the structures that are around them.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Wildman: I'd like to first ask for unanimous consent to defer the leadoff for our caucus on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? It is agreed.

Mr Wildman: I appreciate the cooperation of my colleagues in the House. I'm pleased to be able to participate in this debate, as I have in previous debates about farm practices. I remember going back to when my good friend Ron McNeil represented Elgin county in this House and he brought forward legislation to protect farm practices in this province. I want to indicate clearly that our caucus is in support of this legislation. We will be raising a number of concerns, but that doesn't mean we are in any way denigrating the efforts of the minister to respond to the requests of the agricultural community to indeed protect their normal business practices in a way that will make it possible for them to continue to flourish in the province and to provide the products that are so important to the economy of this province and to all of us as consumers.

We have to look at this bill in the context of what the government is doing in rural Ontario. I am very concerned about the overall approach of the — I'm a little disturbed by the clock there. Are you just changing the clock? We've deferred the leadoff.

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Mr Wildman: I'm concerned about what the government is doing in rural Ontario and the suggestion that this bill, which is entitled An Act to protect Farming and Food Production, ignores the attack that this government has levelled on rural Ontario and the effects this is having on rural residents, whether they be farmers or other business people who provide services and products to farmers in small-town Ontario.

This indeed is quite a surprise to me, actually. As someone who has served in this House for a good many years and has observed governments of all political stripes, I'm surprised that this government, which purports to represent the farm community, would in fact have such a concerted attack on rural Ontario. There is no indication in this legislation that this government is determined to protect family farms at all, particularly in the context of the other things this government is doing.

I think the effort to protect normal farm practices, while laudable, is far outweighed by the other efforts that this government is taking to attack farmers and other rural residents. We've heard mention of the changes to the farm tax rebate. The minister is quite correct when he says that farmers now will pay 25% of the property taxation on their farm land.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: And the buildings.

Mr Wildman: And the buildings, and they will pay 100% on the residential property around that. But what this means of course is that while the provincial government has paid the $170 million to $175 million in the past, this now is being downloaded to the rural municipalities; $175 million is suddenly going to be the responsibility of the rural municipality, and mark my words, the taxes on that rural residence and the land immediately around it are going to go sky-high as a result of this and the other downloading that the provincial government is loading on the rural municipalities in this province.

At the same time, the government is amalgamating and restructuring municipalities and school boards and hospitals and other services in rural Ontario. Suddenly we are going to see a situation where rural residents are going to have far fewer municipal and provincial representatives who will speak for them and instead we're going to see situations like we now have in Chatham-Kent, where this government has imposed amalgamation on the communities, has moved from 21 municipalities to one municipality that inevitably is going to be dominated by the rural centre. I think my friend from Essex talked about that. How is it that a bill that is simply going to protect, as it should, normal farm practices is also going to protect those farm businesses from the inevitable domination of

non-farm people in these larger municipalities on their rural governments?

The same is happening with school boards. Suddenly we have enormous school boards that are inevitably going to be dominated by the urban parts of those communities, and the rural people are going to lose their voice over the education of their kids. How on earth can the minister, who's not just responsible for the agricultural and food industries but also for rural affairs, sit by and allow this kind of attack on rural Ontario? I don't understand it.

What other kinds of things do we have happening? We have the enormous downloading of services. Some people have talked about the transfer of rural highways to rural municipalities. We've also seen, as has been mentioned, the requirement now for rural municipalities to pay for Ontario Provincial Police services. Some of them have paid for it in the past, but now all of them are going to have to pay. I heard one of the members talk about $220 per household as something onerous in his municipality. Let me tell you, in my part of Ontario it's a lot higher than that. The average is between $400 and $450 a household in rural northern Ontario. In one municipality, the township of Day and Bright Additional, the bill estimate from the OPP is $750 per household. The total bill from the OPP is more than the total municipal budget, excluding education, was in 1996. That's what this government is doing to the rural residents of this province.

They can say they are responding to the requests of the farm organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture or the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario through this bill, and they are, but at the same time they're sticking their hands in the pockets of those people and they're taking a lot of money away from rural Ontario and restructuring the province in such a way that the rural voice will not be properly heard in the municipal governments across the rural parts of our province. I think this is most unfortunate.

This government is marginalizing the rural and farm voice in this province. There's a telling quote in the July 15, 1997, issue of Farm and Country magazine, where it says:

"Villeneuve hopes the act will go to second reading when the Legislature resumes sitting and wants the legislation passed before restructuring of rural municipalities begins in 1998.

"'In many instances, the rural voice will be diminished to some degree in our rural municipalities so this is a way to bring balance to the system,' Villeneuve says."

Right there we have an admission by this minister who is responsible for rural Ontario that his government is diminishing the rural voice in the municipalities of rural Ontario. How can the minister justify that? How can a government that claims to represent rural Ontario have a minister who has that responsibility get up and be quoted in a major farm magazine saying, "The rural voice is going to be diminished and that's why we need this kind of legislation"? How can you justify that?

2100

Basically, the minister is admitting that the Harris government, because of its sweeping changes — cuts in services and programs without any thought about what the long-term effects will be on the people they claim to represent — is hurting the people who live in rural Ontario, so he brings forward this legislation in response to the request of the farm organizations.

I ask my friend from Chatham-Kent, what effect is this legislation going to have in protecting the rural voice in Chatham-Kent once that amalgamation is forced through by this government? Frankly, I don't think it's going to give any protection. If 21 or 22 rural municipalities are amalgamated into one municipality, I don't think there's any guarantee that the farmers' interests are going to be protected one iota, even if we pass this bill. I don't think so and frankly I don't think the people in those rural municipalities think so either. When the dust settles from the government decision to amalgamate Chatham-Kent, we'll see how many small communities still have a voice in the municipal government. I don't think very many will at all.

We've also had the arguments in this House and the objections of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture over the cut in the number of rural constituencies represented here in this House. This minister stood by, despite his record in opposition of saying these constituencies must be protected.

We have a provincial government whose actions have had a profound effect on the lives of the people of Ontario, particularly in rural Ontario, through cuts in health care and education and increases in taxation. We have a government that has taken away the right of representation of a huge segment of Ontario. The people who live and work in rural Ontario, on the farms and in the other small businesses in rural and small-town Ontario, are being hit by this government's demand that bigger is better.

The legislation expands the list of disturbances reflected by the nature of local complaints family farms have been subjected to over the last 10 years. It's important to recognize that there haven't been a lot of hearings in the last two years. One of the reasons for that is that under the old legislation, the ministry staff and the board were able to settle a lot of problems before they actually went to hearings. Along with the work of the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has been able to deal with 700 to 800 complaints a year about farm practices. They haven't had to go to too many hearings, and I think this will probably be the case under the new legislation as well.

But what is happening in these ministries is alarming. We've seen enormous cuts of about 50% to both the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources staff. It's going to be very difficult for these ministries to enforce the decisions under this new piece of legislation. Their budgets have been cut substantially. Their local offices have been closed. The people who used to serve farm families and their communities in

these ministries are no longer there because of this government's cuts.

The bill includes an expanded definition of an agricultural operation. The minister mentioned a number of the new operations. I welcome that, and I understand the list can be added to by regulation. These additions reflect the current types of farm operations in Ontario. Bt as I said earlier, I don't think it really deals with the issue of protecting the family farm because of the other cuts and downloading that this government is carrying on in rural Ontario.

This government has systematically deprived Ontario's rural communities and family farms of the support and resources they have come to expect from the provincial government in terms of protecting their environment, their businesses and their way of life, and it's completely irresponsible for this government to carry on this way. The government is not considering the great harm they're causing these communities. There are very broad definitions in the bill, and when you have that, combined with the cuts in staff and program cuts in the various ministries, along with the municipal download, this government has weakened its support of rural communities and family farms right across this province.

Some rural community groups and family farms have argued that the change in the definition of a "normal farm practice" to include "acceptable" might give large corporate farms the same kind of protection as the family farm. I'd like the minister to respond to that concern. I hope he's listening, because I am a little concerned about that. Will this include the practices of corporate factory farms as normal farm practices on the list? I hope he is not contemplating — I don't think he is — the industrialization of agriculture. I hope his desire to protect the economy and the environment of rural, non-farm residents, as well as family farms, will be emphasized in the way the regulations are set under this bill.

The Harris government has cut environmental services, programs and inspections and cancelled the Clean Up Rural Beaches program, the CURB program, which guaranteed that rural residents and family farms, who work hard to be good stewards of their land, will have their environment and water supplies unharmed and their health protected. I don't understand how this government can justify the killing of the CURB program. We know the effect of rural farm runoff in some lakes and rivers in the province. Farmers have expressed concern about it. Those lakes and rivers often empty out into Lake Huron, and the effect that may have on the Great Lakes is very important. I hope particularly that in protecting the family farm and the environment, we're not going to allow for the expansion of factory farming in this province.

Both the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farm Federation of Ontario have said that Bill 146 is not an alternative to, nor could it ever replace, solid provincial agricultural land use legislation. I think this is a cue for the minister and his government to sit down and listen to the farmers in the province, who are concerned about protecting rural farm land, who wish to keep family farms in family hands for future generations. We've got to have good rural land use planning in this province. I don't understand why this government would not have continued the Niagara tender fruit lands program that was instituted by our government, which was cancelled by this government. I think it's time for the minister and the government to start listening to the farmers in this province, who say we have to address the pressures that are leading to so much development on the good farm land we have in the province, particularly the effect this is having on the future of farming across Ontario.

Although this particular bill is helpful to family farms that have subdivisions springing up around their operations and may be the constant target of complaints, I think we have to look at it in the context of what is happening in rural Ontario and what this government is doing.

2110

The proposed bill is similar to legislation in other provinces and the United States. It will protect farmers from vexatious and nuisance complaints which create great tensions between rural neighbours. But there are a number of things that Bill 146 will not do. It will not provide the kinds of supports farmers and rural residents have in other jurisdictions that also have right-to-farm legislation — supports like a solid land use policy for agricultural land and rights to representation at the local and provincial levels so that the rural voice is not diminished, as the minister says it will be.

The bill does not protect farmers and rural residents from problems caused by the Harris government's changes to environmental and health legislation, the cutbacks in inspection staff, program cuts or weakened provincial land use guidelines. It does not protect rural residents from increased property taxes which will result from the downloading that this government is doing across the province and that is particularly affecting rural Ontario. It does not guarantee that farmers' property taxes on their homes will not be increased as a result of that download. It does not give back the protection taken away by the actions of this government, and without solid land use legislation the family farm is threatened in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Comments or questions?

Hon Mr Villeneuve: I want to thank my colleague from Algoma, who has been extremely supportive of previous bills to protect farming and food production. I'm not sure where he is tonight. He didn't quite say whether he was —

Mr Wildman: I said I supported it.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: He's a supporter. Well, he took a while to get on track. He was talking about some of the major changes that were promised by his government. Tax reform was promised by the previous NDP government, but the delivery of that promise never did occur. This government is delivering. This government is picking up $2.5 billion of education costs from the tax bill.

Yes, there is a transfer of responsibilities, where those responsibilities really should be: close to the people who receive those services.

Yes, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs — the "Rural Affairs" portion was tacked on by the previous government, but no funding. The funding was being cut back. There will be funding through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for community reinvestment programs to those communities where, as the honourable member mentioned, the rural voice has possibly been diminished. That's only normal when you amalgamate, because farms are large acreages.

Mr Wildman: Why are you doing that then?

Hon Mr Villeneuve: Because we were left with an $11.2-billion annual deficit. That's a very good reason. There was $50 billion more in debts when you left from the time you came in. Those are the reasons we have to do this. It is tough medicine; however, it's a situation that had to be corrected. The people of Ontario told Mike Harris and his newly elected government, "You had better keep your promises." We're in the process of doing that.

Tax reform: The farm tax rebate is being set on a permanent basis. A community reinvestment fund will look after those municipalities.

Mr Crozier: There are two significant points I'd like to make. The minister just said the farm tax rebate is being put on —

Hon Mr Villeneuve: You're not talking about what I said; it's about what Wildman said.

Mr Crozier: Is it all right with you, Speaker? I really don't listen to the minister. Is it all right with you? Thank you.

The minister says the farm tax rebate is being put on a permanent basis. The provincial government used to pay that $170 million. Certainly they've put it in legislation that it's permanent. What the rural municipalities don't know is where they are going to make up now that $170 million that they're going to have to pay. It's awfully nice of the minister to put one hand out like this, but you've always got to watch the other hand, because it's in your back pocket.

Second, my colleague from Essex-Kent made a point earlier that in the downloading of highways that are considered no longer to be provincially significant, most rural farm businesses are now not going to be able to access a provincial highway. They're going to have to pay for that. I guess the produce that comes off the farms isn't provincially significant.

It's interesting to note, as a matter of fact, that this applies to industry. The largest industry in Essex county outside of the city of Windsor, is the H.J. Heinz Co. Because of downloading, even an industry the size of the H.J. Heinz Co won't be on a provincial highway. Someone — not me — might suggest that the H.J. Heinz Co, which processes agricultural products, isn't significant. therefore we can put them onto a county road. I don't like that kind of downloading.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I was asked, and I might have told you, even if I wasn't, that it's been tradition that comments and questions be addressed to the person that has finished speaking.

Mr Crozier: On a point of order, Speaker: With reference to your tradition, almost all afternoon, government members were talking about whether speeches were made to a particular bill or not. Well, tradition also is that there's a fair amount of latitude.

The Acting Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr Lessard: I want to acknowledge with thanks the comments that were made by my colleague with respect to how supportive he is of farming and the farm community and how he has expressed the concerns of many people who are involved in that industry. He talked about the impact of downloading of provincial responsibilities on our rural municipalities, and the impact that may have on taxes in those communities, how that may lead to increased taxes, and how that may be impacted as well by the transferring of responsibilities for rural roadways, provincial highways on to municipalities as well.

He also made comments about how rural voices are not going to be heard. That's very significant because we know that because of the amalgamation of municipalities and the expansion of urban municipalities out into the counties, the forcing of the cities on to counties, it's going to be more important than ever for rural voices to be heard.

The minister has indicated that he wants this legislation passed before the restructuring of rural municipalities begins in 1998. The member has indicated why he's concerned with that happening, because that's going to have a negative impact on taxation and the diminishing of those rural voices. He's also mentioned the impact of some of the cuts to the Ministry of Environment and Energy and how that's going to diminish their impact on being able to enforce some of these regulations as well.

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel): I'd like to respond to the member for Algoma, although I will say that I listened to much of his speech and he spoke very little with respect to Bill 146.

Mr Len Wood: He was right on target.

Mr Tilson: Well, he expressed some concerns about agriculture, and I suppose it's fair to do that, although we're here to talk about Bill 146. Comments were made by several of the members with respect to the farm tax rebate. This is something farmers have been asking for for years, to solve this issue of this bureaucracy. It went through your government, member for Algoma. I know it was dealt with by your cabinet, I know it was dealt with by the Liberal cabinet, and they never solved that issue. People can grumble about how this is being passed and how it's going to be dealt with by certain municipalities, but this is what the farmers have asked for, so I must congratulate the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for bringing forward this solution to something that has been asked for by farmers for years.

Bill 146, of course, is a commitment that being made by the Conservative government. It was promised during the last election and the minister is fulfilling that promise to deliver a stronger and more effective Farm Practices Protection Act to ensure that farmers have the freedom to

farm responsibly, to boost the economy and create jobs while being environmentally responsible.

This isn't the first time this type of legislation has occurred. I think it was first passed in 1988. It's been some time since this legislation has been reviewed. I congratulate the minister for bringing that.

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Mr Wildman: Ronnie McNeil brought in the right-to-farm bill.

Mr Tilson: Well, The original Farm Practices Protection Act was passed in 1988. I congratulate the minister for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Algoma has two minutes to respond.

Mr Wildman: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry and East Grenville — that's just one of them — Essex South, Windsor-Riverside and Dufferin-Peel for participating and commenting on my remarks. I did say at the outset that we support this legislation, and as the minister acknowledged, going back to Ronnie McNeil's intervention. I supported these kinds of bills throughout my time in this place.

I fully understand the need for them. I live in a rural area; I grew up in a rural area. My neighbour who has a dairy farm from time to time carries out practices that affect the ambience of my home. I fully understand that. We're good neighbours, we get along well and he helps me out from time to time. I understand the need for him to be able to get his work done and to do it well and to be able to produce the milk that is so important for all of us in our economy and for human health.

I put it in the context, though, of the restructuring this government is imposing on rural Ontario. The minister himself said, "There's going to be a diminishing of the rural voice in the province." That's one of the reasons he put forward the need for this legislation. I don't think it's necessary for us to have a diminishing of the rural voice; it's unfortunate that's happening.

I talked about the problems of downloading; the imposition of the cost of rural highways and the OPP on rural communities and what this is going to mean; the imposition of the $170 million farm tax rebate cost to the municipalities. The fact is that farmers and other rural residents are going to see the taxes on their rural residences go sky high because of what this government is doing.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Helen Johns (Huron): It's a pleasure to speak today about Bill 146. Bill 146 is one of the most important bills with respect to my riding of Huron county. I'd first like to take a minute and thank the minister for his commitment to rural Ontario. He, above any of the ministers, has been in my riding two or three times already touring rural farm areas, touring my riding, to ensure that the things he puts into place, and that affect my riding, are well considered. I'd like to thank him first for that commitment to my county and to rural Ontario.

I'd also like to say that rural Ontario has many different attributes to it than we see in urban Ontario. We need to have an ability to let agriculture grow in our ridings. Agriculture is the leading employer in my riding. In fact my Ontario Federation of Agriculture has gone so far as to do a study that talks about all the spinoffs and all the factors that are affected by agriculture in my riding. Believe me, without agriculture in Huron county, we would be in very desperate situations.

As a result of that, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has recognized that Huron county needs to be heard. In fact, when they were going out on their consultations — I heard the parliamentary assistant talk earlier about all the places they went to and he didn't mention Huron county — I want to say that after they were all done, Huron county raised enough of a little fuss that the member for Lambton came in and consulted with our people too. So I have to say to Marcel Beaubien that he did a wonderful job and we certainly appreciate that.

That was as a result of Henry Boot, who is the president of my Ontario Federation of Agriculture, feeling that we had a lot to contribute to the discussions. I think they did. We had a large number of people there and we talked about a lot of issues, so we got a chance to talk about a number of different things that were happening in the riding.

Since this bill has been introduced I have to say that in my riding there has been a lot of discussion. I would be very remiss in not talking about that today. We have had a number of groups talk about where agriculture is going to go in Huron county and where it will possibly evolve to. We all know that in the future we are going to be working very hard to increase our export business, to be able to create spinoffs, to have value added products within our area so that we can create more employment. But at the same time, we have other businesses and assets and important areas within the county also. We have tourism, for example, which is very important to our community and brings in revenue.

With that, we have had some very interesting discussions on the future of agriculture, the future of Huron county, the future of tourism. I'd like to say that one of the most important issues, because we're on Lake Huron, is what should happen with respect to the lake, the environment and agriculture combined. There's no question that this is a balance. We have to have a balance in Huron county, as we do in all of our large agricultural centres. I have discussed, with both members of the opposition and the third party, issues about this actual event that's happening in my riding. I think it's important today to say that all of us in this House have to look for a balance. We have to find a way to let agriculture grow, blossom, create jobs, stimulate our economies, because it's the leading jobgetter in my riding, second in Ontario.

Mr Wildman: Unless you protect the lake, agriculture is threatened.

Mrs Johns: But we also have to ensure that we protect the lake, as my honourable colleague across the room says. I want to say quite clearly and distinctly today that this bill does not give the agricultural community the right to pollute. I think we have been very careful here to say

that this bill cannot override the Environmental Protection Act. It cannot override the Pesticides Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act or the Ontario Water Resources Act. All of those are very important bills that protect our environment and lead us to have a healthy rural economy.

I've spoken to many farmers, both in livestock operations and in cash crops, and they have said that they want to be stewards of their land; they believe that is their most important asset. Most of their money is tied up in the land they have and they own, and they will do everything to protect that land.

I want to reinforce, for people watching today who are thinking about all the conflicting stories that they're hearing and thinking about "How will this affect me?" that the agricultural community does not wish to pollute. What they wish to do is to carry on what we call a normal farm practice. A normal farm practice allows them to do the work that we consider farming within our communities, but at the same time, to be protectors of the environment.

I know that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, along with many different boards and commissions, has come together to talk about how we can best move to protect the environment and allow farming to work hand in hand, if you will. I think they have come up with some very good ideas. In my community many of the different municipalities have come up with manure bylaws which make farmers think about what they should do with manure, how they should look at that and how they should be concerned about how that will be disposed of.

This is a very important issue in farming that has been there since time immemorial, and we have to consider that carefully. I think we will see the agricultural community become more concerned about the manure bylaws in their communities. I think we'll see them work harder to make sure they are being stewards of their land so their land is protected and is there for future generations.

My children are eighth-generation Huron county people. It's important to recognize that they want to stay in Huron county and they want to work to have a great community and at the same time have job growth, have an ability to look forward into the future, be able to have jobs, be able to have farms, be able to have the things we believe are the reasons people should move to rural Ontario.

We have to recognize today that this bill is important, that the government is, first of all, delivering on a promise they said they would, but also allowing the agricultural community to operate without fear of nuisance lawsuits or unnecessarily restrictive bylaws. But at the same time, the agricultural community has to recognize that this bill does not give them the right to pollute; it gives them the right to operate their farms as good stewards of their land. I know that with the help of the OFA and all of the farm organizations, we're going to be able to accomplish this. I hope every member here will be very cognizant of that balance we have to have within our communities so that rural Ontario survives and flourishes.

I'm very proud of this bill. I'm very proud of the agricultural community for taking the active interest they did in it, especially in Huron county. They all came out to talk about this bill. They've written to me, they've called me, they've talked to me. In my area this has been the bill that has had the most consultation of any bill we have had so far. I'm very proud of Huron county for being involved in it.

I once again would like to thank OMAFRA for all the work they've done on this. This is a wonderful start for us in the agricultural community.

The Acting Speaker: It's 9:30. This House stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 2132.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 25 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 25 septembre 1997

The House met at 1003.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Is there a quorum?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Can you please check for a quorum.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present.

HUMBER RIVER

Mr Derwyn Shea (High Park-Swansea): It is with pleasure that I present the following resolution:

That in the opinion of this House, since the Humber River is the largest watershed of the nine river systems in Metropolitan Toronto, and

Since the history of the Humber River is one that parallels the growth and development of Toronto, and

Since the Humber River is currently home to many outstanding recreational, educational and tourist facilities, and

Since the province of Ontario through the Minister of Natural Resources is a signatory to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Charter, which is a voluntary national program that for the last 13 years has recognized and promoted a total of 33 rivers in Canada, including four in Ontario which have been deemed to be culturally and historically important;

Therefore, the government of Ontario should recognize the importance of the Humber River to the history and character of the city of Toronto and the development of Ontario, and encourage the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board to nominate and ultimately designate the Humber River as the first urban river in Ontario recognized under this charter, and

The Minister of Natural Resources should accept the recommendations of this nomination bid and allow for a three-year management strategy to be put in place for the voluntary coordination of all concerned parties to work towards the enhancement of this precious natural resource for the benefit of all Ontarians and their future generations.

1010

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): According to rule 95, the member for High Park-Swansea has 10 minutes.

Mr Shea: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It's always a great pleasure to see the distinguished member for Perth in the chair. I know that he, like all other members of this House, shares my sincere concern with the issues of clean water and clean air. It is without doubt that we all understand that fresh water is essential to life on earth and that Canada is blessed with more than one fifth of the world's fresh water supply, much of it in the province of Ontario, and that our rivers are a priceless and irreplaceable part of our national and provincial heritage and identity. So it is with great pleasure that I advance this resolution today in the hope that my colleagues in this House will support this resolution and allow us to get on expeditiously with the designation of the Humber River.

I was particularly pleased in my research to note that the Minister of Natural Resources and the government of this province are signatories to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Charter. We signed on in 1996, although other governments have been giving support to this system. I applaud all of them, because I think all Ontarians would like to see us take very careful care of our natural resources to ensure that we can return them in a condition that is appropriate as a legacy for our children and their children. I'm pleased to see that we are beginning to recognize the movement that is certainly North American, if not worldwide, as an attempt to restore some natural balance to our environment.

I want to give a little background about the Canadian Heritage Rivers System and why I think it's important that we support this resolution today and encourage the board to designate the Humber River as part of the system. I remind this House that the Canadian Heritage Rivers System Charter was established 13 years ago. It is a national program. It is signed by all 10 provinces and two territories, and Parks Canada acts as the lead agency. The program has no legislative power to enforce compliance, but it is based on voluntary compliance by all parties, private and public, who have interests in any designated river.

I want to pay particular tribute today to the tremendous effort that has been made already in this regard by the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and by other agencies that I'll mention a little later on in my comments to bring us to this point where we hope the

Humber River will be advanced through the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board for designation.

I want to indicate very briefly the vision that is considered appropriate for this designation: that our rivers will be nationally recognized and managed through the support and stewardship of local people and provincial, territorial and federal governments to ensure the long-term conservation of the rivers' cultural, natural and recreational values and integrity.

The charter of the rivers system is nationally recognized and managed through the support and stewardship of the local people, and I think that's terribly important for us all to remember.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt this very important speech. It is indeed a very important matter and I don't believe there is a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Will you please check for a quorum.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: Quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for High Park-Swansea.

Mr Shea: I will remind us that the charter of the system "defines a framework for cooperation between Canada and the provinces and the territories...to recognize, protect and manage, in a sustainable manner, Canada's important rivers and their natural heritage, human (cultural/historical) and recreational values."

That's an important statement for us all in this province that has so many marvellous rivers and fresh water resources. It's important that we manage them to the very best of our ability to the benefit of the ecology and as an appropriate legacy to leave to our children and to their children.

In Metropolitan Toronto we are blessed with a number of fresh water resources, but I want to remind us that they have been under threat for years and years and years. That threat has come to them as a result of the growing urbanism that has been attendant with the economic growth of this province. I remind us of the issue of the fresh water question for Lake Ontario, the Don River, the Humber River, Grenadier Pond, the Credit River and so forth. All of these fresh water resources in the Metropolitan area have been under threat for years and years and years. This rises far above partisan politics; it is an issue that goes to the very systemic nature of our developing community.

In recent years we have discovered I think a new sense of stewardship about the environment that is causing us all to recognize the importance, not only of clean air but also of clean water, and the importance of beginning to take seriously the stewardship issues of those resources. One of the responses in that regard has been the formation of coalitions and alliances of communities and groups to deal with these issues and to apply for designation — in this instance dealing with rivers — to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board to allow a three-year strategy to be put in place for the recovery and refreshment of that fresh water source.

This resolution that I bring before the House today reflects and applauds the tremendous public effort made by so many on behalf of the health and the vitality of the Humber River in this particular instance. As I mentioned at the beginning of my comments, I refer specifically to the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. I could remind us of the Humber River Heritage Committee. There are a number of others that are involved in the coalition and the alliances for the Humber River.

My background as a former chairman of the Metropolitan water pollution committee, chairman of the Metropolitan works committee, has always been one that has been dealing with the issue of water quality. I can tell you we have a long way to go in terms of restoring our fresh water resources to the natural condition they rightly deserve among us. We have, in this community, struggled hard to refresh our fresh water sources. Metropolitan Toronto taxpayers have, to their credit, over the years contributed significant amounts of their property tax dollars to water reclamation issues.

I would like to hope that this House would give its support now to designation of the Humber River, which would allow us to advance this process one step further. I remind us that in the process, when the application is made, the river has to go through a number of quality checks before it is given any designation. It must prove it has natural heritage value; it must prove it has human heritage value, recreational value and integrity value. I can tell you, in terms of recreation value — indeed when I grew up, and that was just a few years ago, it was a river —

Laughter.

Mr Shea: Thank you so much for my colleagues and that burst of laughter. All right, so it was a little more than just a few years ago. But I learned to swim in the Humber River and I learned to canoe in the Humber River, the river along the banks of which I walked and learned to appreciate the flora and fauna of the area. I hold it in very high regard. With sadness I have watched its degradation over the years and would like to see us restore it more and more to its appropriate condition that makes it a natural part of the heritage of this great city.

I remind us of the tremendous value of that river in terms of the economy of this province many years back, not only its prehistoric importance, but I talk about its historic importance — Étienne Brûlé, for example, and his great travel down the river. I might also mention the name of someone by the name of Florence Nightingale Graham, otherwise known to many of us as Elizabeth Arden, who was in fact a resident of Woodbridge, who herself had some associations with the river. So the river has natural heritage values, human heritage values, recreation values and integrity values. I suggest it meets all of the criteria appropriate for designation.

I would ask this House to support the designation advancement to the board for consideration so that it may

join other Ontario rivers that have been so designated — the Bloodvein, the Missinabi, the French, the Mattawa, the Grand — and others that are in the nomination stream, such as the Trent-Severn waterway, the St Marys River and the Thames. I ask for the support of this House on this resolution.

1020

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): It is with pleasure I rise today to support the motion put forward by the member for High Park-Swansea.

The Humber River runs through the riding I represent in York South. It is a vital part of the greenway in Metro and one of the largest river and greenway areas anywhere. Even more important when we talk about heritage rivers is what the Humber River has meant to the development of Toronto and the Toronto area. We look at its historical place as a trading route that connected virtually all of North America in terms of its vital connection to the Toronto carrying place, up to Lake Simcoe.

As a native trading route, it contributed hugely to the history of this particular area. We wouldn't have developed if it hadn't been for the established patterns through the Humber River involving the different trading patterns. It sometimes took as many as 20 years for different items of trade to work their way up from as far away as Mexico to this region.

The French found this to be the route they would use as part of their initiation of trade. They made Baby Point, which is in the southern reaches of my riding, in the part of the Humber River travelling through Metro, into magasin Royal, one of their first forts, and subsequently contributed to the location here of the permanent site put on by Mr Simcoe.

We find indeed that the trade links were so important as to create some of the first families of Toronto. In fact the first European child was born into one of the families of the French traders and was there to greet Governor Simcoe when he came to found the city of York.

We have a political connection arising substantially from the existence and the nature of the Humber River. We would not have been a non-slavery colony had it not been for the water power provided by the Humber River. The Humber River allowed Governor Simcoe to put forward an act to make this one of the first jurisdictions to ban slavery, because the water power on the river substituted for the slaves. So the economic rationale was there for one of the earliest human rights gestures in that regard.

The Humber River drops 1,100 feet from the moraine down to the lake and is able to provide that water power. In fact, at one time there were 23 sites for the use of lumber and other types of mills — just mill sites; that doesn't include the actual number of mills — between Bloor and northern Weston. It was a tremendous source of early economic activity. It defined some of the essential character of Toronto, and it's important to understand that wouldn't have happened without the existence of the lake. We just need to understand slightly how the water power begat the mills, how that itself brought on the need for trades, for carpenters, for masons, for coopers, for people involved in things like belt-making for the mills, and then they became harness-makers who became the locus of the building steps of industry, and that industry eventually became the heartland of Canada's industrial development.

There certainly is no shortage of the heritage requirements to be met by the Humber River. I think many of us living in the current-day Metropolitan Toronto area can glide right on by the Humber River and not realize the contribution it makes. It has every bit the standing in terms of heritage and contribution to our essential forming history as do rivers existing in more raw and natural form without the incursion the rest of us provide in terms of our current-day use of the area.

We recognize that rich history which saw the continuity of this river provide some of the basic definition for Toronto. It was at one time known in fact as the Toronto River, just as Lake Ontario was known as Lake Toronto. When you look at the very name of this place, which means trees reflecting in the water, it was at the mouth of the Humber River that they had stakes for fishing nets that provided that graphic description which led to the place name initially of that river, the lake it came into and this whole region in terms of Toronto.

We know too that this river continues to have a tremendous amount of relevance. For the people who live in the northwest part of Metro, it is their source of current-day relief. It doesn't have the same economic implication, but it certainly does in terms of recreation and quality of life. The trails for biking, for walking up and down the Humber are the essential ingredient for the leisure activities of people who live in this part of Metro.

Something we probably don't recognize on our own is that the Humber River has an essential visual beauty and enjoyment that is comparable to world rivers anywhere. The people who put the work into drawing the Humber River to our latter-day attention compare it to the Seine or the Thames, anywhere in the places that those rivers course.

I think it's essential for us to recognize and celebrate the Humber River in order to recognize the type of quality of life that is available to us and to recognize too that the Humber River is not just a river for Toronto. It comes from the Oak Ridges moraine, it feeds off the Niagara Escarpment, some of the most defining features of the province that we recognize. The Niagara Escarpment has UN designation for its uniqueness, and we recognize too that that part of our natural heritage needs also to be preserved.

We recognize the essential importance that the Humber River has as a linking of the present day with some of our defining characteristics as a city certainly, and probably as a province when we think of the central importance the economic activity I spoke of has played in the development of the whole province. It behooves us very greatly, as we think of the kinds of things we need to do to sustain quality of life, as the word "Toronto" comes into play, encompassing a political entity, it is essential that the values of connection with our past, connection with nature — there has been a tremendous effort made by the people

associated with the Humber River heritage to make sure that the Humber River sustains its place as a living part of our heritage. We see they have identified that 64 out of 75 species of fish that used to be there are still in the river.

There are tremendous efforts made to clean it. I've participated with Frontlines, our youth centre in the city of York, and with the Weston Ratepayers' Association in annual cleanups of the shore along the river. When you see the people out there picking up everything from large tires down to cigarette butts, you see the kind of relevance and importance this still has.

I think the Humber River's particular importance is one of the hidden secrets of Toronto. The heritage designation brought up by the member for High Park-Swansea is very timely and very important to the essential development of this city and of the province, to make sure that we pay attention to the things that have contributed to our quality of life. In making this commitment, which, as I think the member explained quite well, is something of an official gesture that doesn't bring with it a lot of sanction to support the river, it also reflects our commitment to make sure that the Humber River continues to come back to us as a living natural resource, as something that can be enjoyed without the incursions it has had.

1030

Ms Churley: I'm on my feet a little more quickly than I thought I was going to be and I'm not prepared, but I notice that the member for York South, after receiving a note, sat down abruptly.

I don't know if I can speak to this for 15 minutes without becoming very partisan and slamming the government for so many of the cuts they've made in terms of environmental protection, which includes protecting our water.

Let me start by congratulating the member for High Park-Swansea — I know the good doctor across the way is really looking forward to my later comments — for bringing this forward. As he said, and the member for York South said, I suppose overall this is more symbolic than necessarily a call for action to clean up the Humber, to do the kind of work that needs to be done, but indeed a very important symbolism.

As you know, my riding is in Riverdale. My riding is right on the edge of part of the Don River so I certainly understand — I remember my youth a little bit more clearly than the member for High Park-Swansea, but not a lot, not so many days ago. In fact I wasn't here. I grew up in Labrador, right on the edge of what was then called the Hamilton River and was changed eventually to the Churchill River. I grew up on the edge of a large and beautiful river.

I just spent some time there last summer. For the first time ever you could drive right through Happy Valley, Labrador, which is where I come from. It was a terrible drive. I could spend 15 minutes talking about that. It was the first time ever you could drive all the way from Quebec right up to Goose Bay, Labrador. It took two days of very bad road.

I'm mentioning this because having grown up in the wilds, really, and spent my life canoeing, and still enjoy canoeing, I, like many, feel very strongly about preserving and taking care of our natural heritage. Over the years we have forgotten that, and thus we're reaping the problems now that come as a result of the buildup of the area in Toronto.

I know more about the Don River and what's been happening there. Back in 1988 or 1989 — my very brief but productive stint at city council — one of the things I did with Barbara Hall, who was then the councillor for ward 7, and with Jack Layton, who was the councillor for ward 6, was that the three of us worked together and called the first ever Clean up the Don community meeting at city hall.

I remember the first notice we put out. We didn't know how people would respond. I believe the headline in our notice for the meeting was something about, "Do you know that you could once swim in the Don River?" It was that sort of thing, inviting people to come out to a founding meeting to discuss ways that we could get involved, as communities, in our community in Riverdale and then in other communities throughout Toronto where the Don runs, if people would be interested in getting involved.

We were quite surprised and very pleased to see the large turnout. Often, in my experience, I'd get a lot of people out to meetings when I'd call a meeting on traffic, and particularly parking problems, those kinds of things that are very relevant to people in their neighbourhood. It hits them right at their home and they tend to come out in large numbers to deal with issues that affect them directly daily. Sometimes, on other issues, not so many come out. We were quite surprised and gratified to see how many people, from all walks of life, came out to that very first meeting to talk about ways we could start, as a community, cleaning up the Don. As you know, the Don is extremely polluted. There was a time — we have pictures of people swimming and fishing in the Don, as I'm sure the member for High Park-Swansea remembers himself fishing and swimming in the Humber, but you can't do that any more.

I know that now, after the late 1980s when we started this organization, it runs clear across the city. There are thousands of individuals, citizens, who work together with their various city halls, who go out every year. They take part in events. They have cleanup days, just like they do for the Humber River. The citizens come out as volunteers to help clean up the river, a very dirty river now. There are a variety of activities that take place every year on the shores of the Don. People canoe down the Don, being very careful, I might add, not to fall in. The activities every year — I notice the member for High Park-Swansea is laughing about that. I bet he wouldn't want to fall in the Humber at this stage, either.

There are so many citizens across Toronto who are involved in these efforts and it's quite encouraging to see that. So I strongly support this today.

Now I'd like to speak for a few minutes about what I think the government needs to do so that this is not just a symbolic gesture. Let me say , before some of the government members say it, this is private members' hour and

it's supposed to be non-partisan, so I'll be partisan in a very nice way this morning.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): A change.

Ms Churley: You'll see, right? As I've said many times in this House —

Interjection: Is that possible?

Ms Churley: I'm going to try, I said. It depends on the reaction from the parliamentary assistant. The cuts to the environment, the financial cuts and the deregulation, are already starting to have — I know the parliamentary assistant says it's not deregulation, it's re-regulation. It is deregulation. The cuts and deregulation have already had a huge impact on the water quality across our province.

I know the member for High Park-Swansea mentioned conservation authorities. We all know their budgets were cut by about 70% shortly after the government took office. It's become much harder for them to do the kinds of work they did in terms of protecting wetlands and our rivers and doing educational tours, providing educational materials, a lot of the work they did to aid us in these fairly monumental tasks of cleaning up our rivers after so many years of very bad, profound levels of pollution: the runoff, the sewers, the garbage thrown into it, the toxic materials, very polluted. We need these conservation authorities to be part of the effort to preserve and clean up these rivers.

I would like the government — I'm asking politely, as I've asked many times not so politely — to take another look at what — I know it's not being talked about out there a lot because we have problems with health care, education, labour matters and women's shelters, and it goes across the board, so people are concerned about a lot more things. But overall, when polls are done on what people feel about environmental protection, the polls will show very high numbers, over 80% in most cases, who believe governments should be responsible for cleaning up the environment and preserving our environment and our health. On the whole people expect by now that governments are doing that.

When you get a barrage of cuts to the environment, there may be the brief headline or so, and then there are the dedicated people whose professional or daily lives, on a volunteer basis or whatever, are involved in environmental issues, who try to get the attention of the government, try to point out the problems with some of the cuts.

This is a good indication. The reason I believe the member for High Park-Swansea has brought this forward is that he is aware that, beyond a very important part of Ontario and our heritage, there are a lot of problems with the pollution in our rivers and that we need to call on not only the citizens, but we also have to expect — and he's right that the Metro government, the Toronto city government, have over the years put money and time and effort into the cleanup of our rivers, but the provincial government has a role to play as well, beyond a symbolic gesture today.

1040

I don't see any reason why all members in this House will not support this today. If I may say so, it really is a motherhood resolution before us today. The member will be able to feel good at the end of the session today. I'm sure everybody will support his motion. But I'm glad to find out today that — do we have a tree hugger in the Tory caucus? Do we? I don't know. But I know if there is a tree hugger in the Tory caucus, he should beware because they don't like tree huggers in that caucus. I don't know if I'm inviting him to join our caucus or not. There might be a few other questions asked first. But starting off as a tree hugger is good.

I believe that if the member for High Park-Swansea is interested in the Humber River he may have interests in other environmental matters as well. I would say to him that we very definitely need an ally, one ally, in the Tory caucus to help us in our quest to get some of the funding and the regulations that have been thrown out brought back in.

Do you want to speak to this for a few minutes?

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): You're doing fine.

Ms Churley: I was just asking my new colleague here, the member for Windsor-Riverside, if he wanted to say a few words, because I know he's very interested in the environment and has been for many years. I know that in his city of Windsor he has been very active over the years in environmental concerns and issues.

In terms of the environmental problems that have come about because of some of the cuts, the monitoring stations, for instance, for water have gone way down. There are hardly any left in the province any more. One of the big concerns about water in Ontario is the real concern that the government is in the process of starting to privatize our water, which is something we strongly object to, because our water is not only part of our natural heritage; the air we breathe and the water we drink are what keep us alive.

Some of the downloading, for instance, of responsibilities to municipalities in terms of sewers is worrisome as well, because you tend to think when you hear the word "sewer" that not a lot of people get into it, I must admit. The member for Welland-Thorold might be interested in sewers —

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Very interested.

Ms Churley: — but not a lot of people are interested in it. But as you know, sewers have played a very large part in the polluting of our waterways over the years, and it still is a problem. I'm concerned to see that the government is downloading that responsibility, without giving the municipalities the proper tools and the proper funding. The government has cut all kinds of funding in terms of keeping our water clean.

Mr Galt: Now we know how the debt got doubled.

Ms Churley: Well, health comes first. I can tell the member how the debt got doubled, but people's health comes first, and keeping our environment clean comes first as well. You can't just decide to cut because you need it for your 30% tax cut and then figure out — which is this government's policy overall: Cut first, let it all fall apart, create the mess, ask questions later, and then start

cleaning it up. That's why we're in such a mess today in terms of the environment and why rivers like the Humber are becoming so dirty: not enough attention has been paid to it.

In closing, I firmly support your resolution today and am happy to do so.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton North): I'd like to thank the member for High Park-Swansea for bringing this resolution forward today.

The Humber River is a living reminder of the importance of waterways in the history of our great province of Ontario. In fact, it was down the Humber River in 1615, I believe, that Étienne Brûlé first travelled. Étienne was a personal aide to Samuel de Champlain. He came down the Humber River in the year 1615 on a mission to visit the Carantouan tribe of Indians in eastern Pennsylvania, and my apologies to the tribe for that pronunciation of their name. As such, he was the first European to gaze upon the waters of Lake Ontario. That first gaze was taken from the mouth of the Humber River, so it's a significant river in the history of this province.

Brûlé was on his way down to visit that Indian tribe in eastern Pennsylvania to bring about 500 braves up to do battle with the Iroquois, the Onondagas in those days, in around the Finger Lakes area. Champlain was travelling with his Huron friends with another 500 friends, warriors, and they were to meet in the Onondaga area and do battle against their arch foes, the Iroquois.

However, Brûlé, having travelled across Lake Ontario and up the Niagara River, was delayed, and I suspect he was delayed because he was probably also the first European to lay eyes on Niagara Falls. Being an explorer and enjoying the pastime of exploring new lands and being the first European to cast eyes on new geographical formations, I'm sure that he would not pass by Niagara Falls without visiting it.

As such, he was two days late visiting the battle site, in which Champlain was wounded in the leg and had to be carried home. Étienne Brûlé decided that perhaps the better part of valour would be not to return to Montreal right away, and he spent the next 15 years, with the exception of one visit, among the Indians.

During that period of time, the reports of missionaries and coureurs de bois of the area reported seeing him in various other parts of the Great Lakes basin, and it is probably arguable that he was the first European to view each of the Great Lakes, and that would include Niagara Falls. I think Étienne Brûlé is to be remembered in Canadian history not only as perhaps a character but as a true explorer, because he made no maps, he kept no journal of his journeys. As such, he travelled and explored merely for the joy of doing so.

The historical designations we are involved in in this debate today, this resolution today, remind us not only of the geographical formations that are before us and act as reminders, but they also remind us of the early explorers who passed through this land. They are something that is tangible that will remind us of the people like Étienne Brûlé, who perhaps ended his life in less glorious terms, in helping the English conquer Quebec City in 1629, and therefore not being very popular with his French compatriots at the time. But we are reminded of his history through the designation of this river and through other historical designations. That memory of early explorers will serve us well in our history. If we forget about our history, we are doomed in our future.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a cooperative program of governments of Canada in all 10 provinces, as the member for High Park-Swansea has mentioned. Ontario's representative on the board is the director of Ontario Parks. If a nomination is deemed worthy of inclusion in the system, it is recommended to the Minister of Natural Resources and the federal Minister of Canadian Heritage.

In the member's resolution, he speaks about the size of the Humber River watershed. It covers about 900 square kilometres. It's a huge area from its headwaters in the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine all the way down to the shores of Lake Ontario.

The point I'd like to make this morning is that the input and acceptance of all the local municipalities along the watershed are very important to this government, which is strong on consultation and listening to the local municipalities and their points of view.

The designation of a river is a symbolic honour. However, some municipalities have raised concerns that this designation may lead to future intrusions in municipal planning. This would certainly not be the government's intention, but it is important to note that the Ministry of Natural Resources will not move ahead with this designation without the support of local municipalities in this watershed.

That being said, I'd like to commend the member for High Park-Swansea for bringing this resolution forward and highlighting the great contributions the Humber River has made to the development of Ontario.

1050

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I am delighted to join the debate and spend the next few minutes on this topic. I commend the member for High Park-Swansea for bringing it forward.

It occupies a special place for me, since I represent the area that is completely straddled by the Humber River and I have myself resided in the so-called Humber Summit, which is an old settlement area. For the last 30-odd years, that's where I have lived. As a matter of fact, one of the early settlers, Joseph Rowntree, and the Rowntree family back in the late 1800s had a very successful mill, as the area was known for the mill's operations. Now we enjoy, not only as local residents but as a community within the Metropolitan Toronto area, and we have groups that come from far and wide to enjoy, the so-called Rowntree Mills Park. It's a beautiful area. It's wide. The river meanders around the now-residential area and it affords a tremendous recreational opportunity for everyone, visitors and residents alike.

I also have the very distinct pleasure, if I may say so, to live on what is now called Rowntree Mill Road, which

was dedicated to the Rowntree family, and we also have at the mouth, at Rowntree Mill, at Islington Avenue, an old settlers' cemetery which is an historic site. Just up the street we have the Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church, which dates prior to Hurricane Hazel back in 1954. So the area abounds with history.

But let me get back for a second to the matter in front of us here, because I only have four minutes, unfortunately. I think we have to support today the initiative and support the designation of the Humber River as the first urban river to be recognized by the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

It's most important that we allocate the Humber River its place, and rightly so, in history. The Humber River is full of history from top to bottom, as we heard from the last speaker. Even today you can appreciate and visit and see in South Humber Park a plaque commemorating the arrival of the first white person, Étienne Brûlé, who came down through the then-known, as it is today, Humber Trail, which used to be the only passage, which was first used by the aboriginal people and then by the settlers who arrived later, the only connection to Huronia, as we now know.

With the passage of time and the opening of other roads and with things like horses and cars, that became less known. But I have to say that at a particular time, the Humber River, especially in the north end, at the Humber cemetery now, contained I believe some 84 mills back in 1817, and then they started to diminish as time went by.

I have to say thanks in the House today to a number of people who on a continuing basis, a voluntary basis, are giving their time to support the natural beauty of the Humber River and maintain it. I would be remiss if I didn't mention a particular group in my own area, the Humber Crang, which continually does numerous projects cleaning up the Humber River. They are one of the very active participants in maintaining and raising awareness of the Humber River.

As well — and who doesn't know? — I'd like to give credit to my colleague from York South, Mr Kennedy, because there is a group of people working from the south end, especially Madelaine McDowell from Humber River Heritage. And who doesn't know Jane Jacobs? She continually holds tours and conferences with respect to the Humber River, and I think this speaks very loudly to the importance of the river.

I don't have time to go into the various aspects, the object as to why we should support the motion and make sure that the Humber River is recognized as such. If it's not done, I'm afraid that what we have enjoyed in the past and what we are enjoying now — I have to say that there is a trail which is part of the 84 kilometres along the Humber River which is being enjoyed by everyone. It is full of flora and fauna. There are deer, there are rabbits, there are raccoons, all kinds of wild animals for the enjoyment of the residents, kids and everyone in general.

In finishing, it is important that we ensure that the integrity of the natural heritage, the human heritage and the recreational value of the Humber River is kept.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): It is my privilege to rise and speak to Mr Derwyn Shea's ballot item number 99 and his resolution number 73. Mr Shea's resolution, for those who may be bringing it into context, is to recognize the important heritage significance of the Humber River, the largest watershed of the nine river systems in Metropolitan Toronto.

I respect Mr Shea very much, and on a personal note I would have to say that Mr Shea and his lovely wife, Julia, reside on the most beautiful Grenadier Pond. Recently I was asked as a guest to attend a small reception at their home and was pleased to watch what seemed to be remote-control white swans gracing the beautiful Grenadier Pond. That, as I'm sure Mr Shea recognizes, is meant in a very complimentary manner.

Mr Shea's resolution further goes on to serve as an education for perhaps each and every one of us who is paying attention today. Respect for our heritage: really, that's the theme. It's learning and respecting our heritage through knowledge. To me, the most important thing is to look at the importance of history. The waterways of this great province have served to both develop and explore, and still nurture each one of us today. Mr Chudleigh has given us a very fine history lesson as well.

I thank Mr Shea for bringing this to our attention. That the Canadian Heritage Rivers System was developed some 13 years ago was completely new to me. I apologize for my lack of knowledge on the subject, but it serves as a very definite focal point for us to examine why people like Mr Shea take the initiative to recognize these important geographical features and heritage aspects of our country.

In preparing to respond to Mr Shea and support his resolution, I looked to my immediate riding of Durham East. I looked to my own riding to see what I could learn about the history and heritage of our river systems. I am pleased to share with people that my riding of Durham East is east of Oshawa, is part of Durham region, and its southern boundary is the north shore of Lake Ontario. Lake Ontario is a great heritage body of water as well. In fact, the shoreline is graced by three or four very significant class 1 and class 2 wetlands. I might add that the Lynde Creek Marsh, as well as the Second Marsh, east of the General Motors headquarters building in Oshawa, and the Eastside Marsh, which is in Bowmanville, adjacent to the St Marys Cement property, are three very important class 1 and 2 wetlands that act as the lungs or filtration system for a very important creek system.

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I was pleased, when preparing for this morning, to examine the creek systems which feed these marshes; the water eventually goes to Lake Ontario. The creek systems are the Lynde Creek, of course, Black Creek, Farewell Creek, Bowmanville Creek, Soper Creek and Wilmot Creek. These are all widely known in the area, and not really appreciated for their importance. There were mills and all sorts of activity in the early economy and development of Ontario settlements. Bowmanville Creek had a number of important sawmills. In fact, Bowmanville's history can be traced completely to the establishment of a

mill for milling flour and other agricultural products. If I move further north in my riding of Durham East, I come immediately to the Ganaraska Forest, which is an important forest stand, and also the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority, which looks after the creek system and the flooding issues around the conservation mandate.

I run into the Oak Ridges moraine. I heard one of the previous speakers mention the Oak Ridges moraine. That almost completely crosses my riding of Durham East. We all know that the Oak Ridges moraine was the shore of the ancient Lake Iroquois, a once-great lake during the glacier period that has since receded.

It's important to go back to the basics of this discussion this morning, to talk about the heritage. I thank Mr Shea for encouraging me to look into the heritage of my own riding. I would ask everyone to do that. It's not just about the Humber or the Don or Soper Creek. It's the whole aspect of the importance of our waterway systems in Ontario and indeed our great country.

I just want to wrap up my remarks. Moving north in my riding of Durham East, we have Lake Scugog. Lake Scugog is more or less a manmade lake. I've got a bit of history on that which I'll share. It served as an important part of Port Perry; in fact it gave it its very fundamental economic purpose for existence. It served to transfer logs and other kinds of things down through the Trent system. I'll cover that in a moment. The history of Lake Scugog — I think this is important; I just learned this, actually — is that in 1828 the government gave a Mr Purdy permission to build a dam at Lindsay to power a grist mill. That mill was destroyed in 1929 and there was another dam built. Anyway, Lake Scugog then became a flooded area for the purpose of transferring both grains and lumber downstream. It eventually feeds into the Trent system, and I know my friend Mr Rollins is going to talk about the Trent system.

I want to conclude by saying that I have a cottage on the Otonabee River. This was once my grandfather's farm. The Otonabee River is just south of Peterborough and it's part of the Trent-Severn waterway system, which in itself deserves a complete discussion. But I know the Trent system is going to be covered by Mr Rollins, so I'm going to relinquish the rest of my time for him. I thank Mr Shea for the opportunity to speak on this subject this morning.

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): It will do me great good to support the member for High Park-Swansea in bringing forward the Humber as a designated river. As my colleague from Durham East mentioned, I am going to talk about the Trent. It's also on the nomination list. I think it is the greatest inland waterway there is in Ontario, stretching from the shores of Lake Ontario up to the shores of Georgian Bay, with many locks and rivers and streams feeding into that great Trent system. We need to make sure we can travel that, as did our forefathers before us, and be able to see to the bottom of that great river. We've always been able to do that.

It hurts me, and I know it hurts a lot of us, to drive by the Humber and see the stuff floating down it. We've got to protect that environment for our children and particularly our grandchildren. I know it's only one little step for the future to put forward this nomination that our member has to make sure our grandchildren and great-grandchildren have the opportunity to see to the bottom of some of these rivers. It's very unfortunate to see how they have been polluted and mismanaged.

This is one step closer back to our heritage, back to our basics, where we've got to respect the soil, the water and the air. It has been said in this House that we as a government have done a lot of cutbacks to those. I can tell you that there are more people in this 82-member caucus on this side who are concerned about the waterways and the lands we all grew up on and breathe and work with than a lot of people want to give us credit for. We're going to have to make sure those waterways are left clear for us.

The Trent-Severn stretches from Trenton; it goes through my riding. The amount of boat traffic that goes up and down that each year is absolutely fantastic. When we see people from other countries express appreciation about the beauty of the Trent and being able to float up and down that, through all the canals and everything, it does me good to stand up and support the resolution this morning. Thank you and congratulations.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for High Park-Swansea.

Mr Shea: It's been very gratifying to hear the comments in the chamber today, to hear the comments from the member for York South, who represents the riding just immediately north of mine, who has echoed many of the points I raised during my outlining speech.

I appreciate the member for Riverdale, particularly her diligence in environmental issues. She expressed a number of questions about the issue before us, also reminding us that while this may appear to be symbolic, there is an opportunity, particularly in the three-year plan, to make this much more than symbolic, in fact to drive a recovery plan that's extremely important for this river, and I hope similarly for all the other freshwater resources that are so designated around this province.

I'd like to thank the parliamentary assistant of natural resources, the member for Halton North, who I think gave a remarkably fine historical setting for the river and reminded us of its contribution. He went back to 1615. I have to respond to the comments of the member for Riverdale: I was not swimming in the river in those years; it may only appear like that. But I do appreciate the comments of the member for Halton North, who also reminded us of the significant contributions of this river to the Niagara Escarpment and to the world biosphere and so forth. We should be conscious of all of that.

The member for Yorkview has given his comments about the quality of the water. I appreciate the comments of the member for Durham East, who has reminded us of the importance of the wetlands in his riding. That was picked up by the member for Quinte, who, in a very heartfelt way, reminded us of the determination we all have to restore the environment and make sure we leave a legacy for our children and their grandchildren that is one of honour.

I seek the support of this House in moving the Humber River one step closer to its designation.

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton North): I move that in the opinion of this House, given that plant breeding and the science of biology (the study of living organisms) have been used for years in enhancing the quality of our food supply and are critical to the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of a safe agriculture and food industry in Ontario; and

Given the understanding that agricultural biotechnology is becoming an ever-emerging field of importance in transforming the global agriculture and food production industry by creating an increasingly competitive global food commodity market; and

Given that in a world of change, if government and industry fail to form strategic partnerships and lead the way as innovators towards this 21st-century industry, they face being driven out of the competitive global marketplace;

Therefore, the government of Ontario should recognize the importance of safe and cost-effective biotechnology and support well-researched science in advancing Ontario's agriculture and food production to ensure the industry's viability and competitiveness in the global marketplace and continue to work with all levels of government to ensure a safe food supply for the consumer and protect Canada's high standard and world leader status as a safe supplier of food; and

The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs should provide leadership and support to Ontario biotech initiatives and recognize their importance to future opportunities for growth, jobs and investment and continue to coordinate and support biotech research and development, and to lead efforts in pursuing investment from financial institutions for biotech and its applications for the agriculture and food industry in Ontario and become the political champion of this budding technological industry of the 21st century.

1110

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Pursuant to standing order 96(c)(i), the honourable member has 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr Chudleigh: I'm pleased to rise in the House today and discuss the future of agriculture and food in Ontario and indeed the world. Much like the Industrial Revolution was to mass production, or the invention of the microchip was to the advancement of computer technology, biotechnology is a 21st-century tool that will change agriculture and food production and productivity forever. My resolution calls on the government to recognize the importance of this new technology to Ontario's agrifood industry, provide leadership and support to Ontario's biotech initiatives, and champion this new field politically and in the financial community.

When I refer to biotechnology as a new technology, this isn't necessarily accurate. While many applications of agricultural biotechnology are new, the practice of plant breeding, seed selection and the study of living organisms have been around for over 10,000 years. In fact, as far back as 8000 BC people have saved the best of their crop to use as seed for the following year.

Today the study of genes has taken us to a powerful level of understanding, where we can use information to improve our overall quality of life. There are, however, many obstacles and myths to overcome while dealing with the powerful new applications of this science. Many of those in the House today will undoubtedly have heard about experiments regarding cloning of sheep and other organisms. There has been a mountain of speculation in the media as to the perils of these practices and their effects on people, especially when the technology is applied to humans.

Biotechnology, and specifically agricultural biotechnology, has in the past been poorly defined and generally misunderstood. Dr John Waugh, president of Calex Biosciences in Nepean, gives us far more poignant reasons to pursue this technology and highlights some very real concerns with the future of food safety. Dr Waugh wrote to me in support of this resolution, stating, "Agrifood biotechnology is not only one of the fastest growing industries in the world today, it represents one of the most critical of all human enterprises because of its potential to provide for safer foods, a cleaner environment and better health."

He goes on to say that recent outbreaks of E coli diseases in various parts of the world and BSE, more commonly known as mad cow disease, transmitted in beef in the UK, are clear examples as to why Ontario as a province should be concerned with food quality and food safety.

Canada is recognized as a world leader in the production of a safe food supply. The Canadian Seeds Act, the Canadian Feeds Act, the Health of Animals Act and the Canadian plant act, among others, provide the basis of regulations for food production in Canada. Through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the principles of this regulatory framework are put into action. The agency maintains standards, develops guidelines for testing and new products, provides a scientific assessment of risk and evaluation of products, and most importantly, ensures that the regulations contribute to growth and investment in the agrifood industry. Other countries, including Japan, have based their entire food safety systems on the regulatory framework we in Canada have enjoyed in developing and maintaining a safe food supply of their own.

That is why it is imperative that we take the steps necessary to lead the way for the development of biotechnology in Ontario. As recognized leaders in the safe production of food, Ontario has an opportunity to be a world leader in agricultural biotechnology and food production. We must be innovators and accept the challenge which is rightfully ours. If we fail to capture this opportunity, we risk being left behind in agrifood production and, more importantly, as world leaders in the safe production of foodstuffs.

Don't just take my word for it. There is a long list of supporters of biotechnology and of my resolution in the House today. They include the following organizations and individuals who wrote in support of this motion: Richard Penner, chair, and Paul van den Berre, vice-president, of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association; Murray McLaughlin, president of Ontario Agricultural Food Technologies Inc, which represents over 30 industry groups including growers' associations and universities; Ray Mowling, vice-president of Monsanto; Terry Daynard, Ontario Corn Producers' Association; Larry Anderson, chair of the Ontario Bean Producers' Marketing Board; Tom Lassalin, chair of the Ontario Soybean Growers' Marketing Board; M. Rozanski, president of the University of Guelph; and Larry Milligan, vice-president of research, University of Guelph, to name a few of the supporters of this resolution. Seated in the members' gallery today are a few of these supporters of the resolution and I'd like to recognize them at this point and thank them for coming here and showing their support today.

If the names and faces of Ontario's biotechnologies haven't yet swayed you in support of my resolution, the following should: Recent estimates predict that worldwide sales from current biotechnology products will hit $150 billion by the year 2000. It is a technology that is already upon us. Ontario currently has the biotech infrastructure to become a world leader in biotech. If it does, it means much-needed jobs and stability for Ontario's farm community and rural heartland. Not only will there be jobs for Ontario's farmers, but a wealth of investment and growth for our intellectual community and the benefit of attracting global industries to Ontario with billions of dollars in spinoff potential. It's good for agriculture, it's good for safe food production and it's good for Ontario.

The proof is already here. Just last Friday, the Premier helped plant one of the 75 transgenic grapevines developed in Ontario at the University of Guelph to produce a stress-resistant grape that could revolutionize the growing of grapes and the production of wine in Ontario. The vine is expected to have a greater resistance to cold of between three to five degrees of Celsius. It doesn't sound like much but that's a tremendous amount in horticultural production, enough to avoid serious crop damage when winter temperatures fall to below minus 25 degrees Celsius.

Products like the grapevine and others currently being developed will give us a worldwide reputation as leaders in the field of biotechnology. The time is now for Ontario to lead the way to this new technology for the 21st century. If we fail to take this initiative, we'll be forced to follow in the footsteps of others and eventually get pushed out of the way. The innovators of agricultural biotechnology will not wait for us to get our act together while a rapidly growing world population, developing nations and depleting resources for food production put greater pressure on world food supplies.

Ontario must take this opportunity to provide leadership in Canada and the world in developing and producing products as a result of agricultural biotechnology. We must also, as a government, be willing to provide the political leadership and assistance necessary to get us there. Passing this resolution is a good start and it sends a signal to everyone involved in agriculture and food production that their government is listening and understands where the future is going but, more importantly, is committed to helping Ontario get there first. I ask the support of the House for this very important resolution.

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): I am indeed pleased to speak to the resolution put forth this morning by the member for Halton North. This is the second time we've had a resolution put forth by a government member urging the Minister of Agriculture to get on and do his job, to get on and do what is normal within the realm of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It was not long ago in this House that the member for Huron stated that she thought that the minister should get out there and speak with the farmers and farm organizations of Ontario, and once again we have a member of the government stating that the minister should be acting.

In part, the resolution says, "The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs should provide leadership and support to Ontario biotech initiatives and recognize their importance to future opportunities for growth...." It says the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs should provide leadership; it doesn't say that he has been providing leadership. The member is urging the minister, Mr Villeneuve, to get on and do what is correct.

1120

I have often spoken about research and development in this House and I've stated before that for every dollar of investment there can be a $40 return in terms of research and development. That is a return that is absolutely phenomenal. We must be able to develop our research in regard to biotechnology and other areas here in Ontario. We can keep the technology here — we don't need to buy it from other sources — and then we can sell quality food products to a growing population not only here in Ontario, not only here in Canada, but indeed throughout the world.

We need research and development, as does any industry. Agriculture is no different than any other industry in the world. We need to maintain our competitive advantage with a proper regulatory system and of course financing and support from all levels of government.

Examples of what research and development has done for agriculture can be seen in the area of corn production where we've had a 100% increase since 1975 and we are using 25% less energy to achieve that goal. The same could be said of soybeans. There have been great advances in soybean technology. The member who has put forth this resolution would know full well that in the apple industry there have been great strides and great changes in how we produce that crop and how indeed it is grown.

What we have in Ontario currently is a situation where the University of Guelph and the agricultural colleges have come under one umbrella. The faculties have been downsized by 20% at the University of Guelph. For example, the effect on pig research is that when 12 researchers left, only five were replaced. I quote from an article in the Kent and Essex Farmer: "Generally, we're replacing

one researcher for every three or four that we lose." That's sad.

Ontario Agricultural Food Technologies, whose president is Mr Murray McLaughlin, is made up of grower associations, 12 in number, universities, five in number, and from industry, 11, and they recognize the importance of agricultural technology here in Ontario. Indeed they are a non-profit organization formed to focus Ontario's participation in developing, promoting and adopting biotechnology in the agrifood sector of this province.

I have been a proponent of agricultural research for many years. We will support this resolution put forth by the member opposite. I hope this is a foreshadowing of a statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on his commitment to technology and biotechnology research here in Ontario, and I hope it happens soon.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I want to speak in support of this resolution for a few minutes, because this is another of those sort of mom-and-apple-pie types of resolutions that it's very difficult for any member to vote against. As the member for Essex-Kent has indicated, the resolution says, "The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs should provide leadership and support to Ontario biotech initiatives...." Really this is a resolution to encourage the Minister of Agriculture and Food to basically do his job, and how can any of us really object to that?

It also goes on to say that he should "lead efforts in pursuing investment from financial institutions." That is important as well, but we all recognize that government has a role to play in providing financial initiatives for business and for farmers as well and providing the resources to promote research into biotechnology as well. This isn't something that farmers are going to be able to do all on their own. This is something that they need some backing from the government to do as well.

My area is not an area that is predominantly farms or family farms — it's a suburban area that I represent — but we do have a major food producer in that area. It's Family Tradition Foods, formerly known as Green Giant. A few years ago Green Giant was going to take its plant out of the town of Tecumseh and take the jobs that were connected with it from the town, and it was the assistance that was provided by the then NDP government that ensured that the plant continued to exist and those jobs were maintained in the town of Tecumseh.

A couple of weeks ago I was back at that plant to celebrate the grand opening of a freezer-packing facility. That's a situation, an example, of where the government and industry in partnership can create jobs and advance the food packaging and production industry. Of course that plant uses farm products, products that have been developed and improved over the years because of improvements in production and hardier, resistant-type crops. They package things like corn, tomatoes, cauliflower, cabbage and products like that. They ship these all around the world. We know with further research, if they were products or vegetables that were more resistant to frost, they would be able to increase their production in that area, so this sort of research is something that is necessary.

We also have great production in our area of grapes that are used for wine-making. It's not just the Niagara Peninsula that specializes in the production of wine grapes. We have those down in Essex county as well. Once again, developments in more frost-resistant types of grapes would certainly benefit the wine-making industry in Essex county.

Having said that, we also know it's important to have a regulatory background when it comes to research and development in the biotech area. This is something that we all need to put our minds to as regulators, because we can't have research and development going on in an unfettered manner. We need to ensure that the products that are being developed are nutritious and safe and they increase product yield but they're not being done without any input from regulators. That's not such a big concern when it comes to fruit and vegetables, but it is a bigger concern when it comes to animal research.

The member who has introduced this resolution has made reference to the cloning of sheep that took place in Scotland, and that's an area that we all need to be concerned about, further developments in the cloning of animals and the development of different types of agricultural products.

Leadership and support of these initiatives are important, of course, but a strong regulatory framework in which this research and development can take place is important as well, because we've seen examples of what unfettered development of different types of products does to our environment. I'm thinking about products like CFC. Not an agricultural product, of course, but at the time that was developed there wasn't a great deal of thought about the future impact that CFCs were going to have on our atmosphere and the patterns in our weather. We've seen that has been very disastrous in increasing global warming. We want to make sure that when we're developing agricultural products we're not creating something that is going to be more harmful in the future, even though initially there may be increased yields and benefits to our communities.

I want to raise one other concern. I want to share some time with the member for Riverdale as well. We need to address our minds as to how we can ensure that increased advances in biotechnology are going to benefit people who are on the family farm and ensure that this isn't something that is going to just benefit large corporate farms. This is an expensive type of development and we need to ensure that when these products are developed, people who are on family farms are able to take advantage of that technology and the cost of it doesn't become prohibitive and therefore ensure that only large corporate farms are going to be able to benefit from this improved technology.

Just in closing, I support the motion and I do agree that government and industry need to form strategic partnerships, as has been indicated in the resolution, but those

partnerships also need to include, on occasion, financial assistance and regulation as well.

1130

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): It's a pleasure for me to rise and speak on the resolution of the member for Halton North. Just before I really get into that, I'd like to set the record straight on some of the comments that were made by the member for Essex-Kent. I know he is not in his seat, but he is still in the House. It has to do with some of the criticism of the Minister of Agriculture and Food and some of the support.

I bring to his attention that some $5 million is being given to the University of Guelph, as I understand it, for research. Also, I suggest that our Minister of Agriculture and Food is an exemplary minister. He has been on three circuits of the province since election time, on consultation to find out what it is the farm community wants. I was very impressed to be at one of those last July and to hear the response from the public, and to be here last night to see the number of people in this House supporting the minister and his right-to-farm legislation being brought in for second reading last evening.

He also made reference to the member for Huron criticizing the minister, when in fact I was here last night — I thought he was — and she was complimenting the minister for the number of times he has been in her riding and consulting with the constituents of Huron county, so I was a little surprised with that comment.

Also, in connection with research and development in general in this province and what came out in the last budget, some $3 billion is to be spent over the next 10 years, in partnership with business and with universities and with the Ontario government. I don't know of any government in the past, particularly theirs, that really did that kind of thing for research and development. That is just to set the record straight and bring those to your attention.

Speaking on biotechnology, I'd like to talk for a few minutes about the father of high-yield agriculture. His name was Norman Borlaug and he was really the one who sparked the green revolution. If it hadn't been for him, literally millions of people today would be starving in this world.

We don't know too much about him, because he spent most of his time working in Third World countries. He developed the specialty rice varieties in the Philippines and the wheat varieties in Mexico. Really, in our part of the world, he received very little recognition until he received the Nobel Peace Prize back in 1970.

In the 1960s, when we had a population of between two billion and three billion in this world, there were great predictions that there was going to be massive starvation over the next few decades. There was even a book written at that time — it was a bestseller — called Famine 1975, but because of this plant breeder, we reversed the world food shortages that would have occurred. When you think about people who are starving today, it has nothing to with food production; it has to do with wars, particularly civil wars within countries. The food is there if we can get it to the people who desperately need it. It's quite a turnaround from what we had back in the 1960s.

I had the opportunity to work for a year in Indonesia, on the island of Java, in the city of Jogjakarta, and I saw first hand what this green revolution was doing for the people there, the biotechnology that created the green revolution. That was a country that was a massive importer of foods back in the 1960s and into the 1970s. Today that is a country that actually exports some food, all because of the green revolution. They are able to produce enough rice that they have small quantities to export, but at least they have come to a balance and are not in the position they were before.

They have a very rich soil, very heavy clay. Some dozen volcanoes spew out some very rich volcanic ash, so the quality of soil hadn't been a problem, but what they needed was biotechnology and to come up with the kind of plants so that they could plant rice three times a year and get the kind of production that was needed for that country.

The island of Java is about the size of southern Ontario, roughly 100 miles or 150 miles wide at the most, and they had a population when I was there of well over 100 million. They guessed it was in the neighbourhood of 120 million and growing quickly. Something like 50% of their population was under the age of 20 at that time. You can see the kinds of pressures that are going to come to a country such as that.

There is no question that more food, because of biotechnology, is being created on less land, and because of this — I'd like the member for Riverdale to take particular note of the fact — it preserves tremendous tracts of areas for wildlife habitat, and certainly into the future is going to preserve a tremendous amount of forest habitat for our wildlife.

Borlaug also had many other accomplishments. Shuttle breeding was one, for example, whereby they were able to speed up the disease resistance of certain strains of crops that previously weren't resistant. He developed cereals that could grow in various climates and various kinds of daylight. He developed a dwarf spring wheat that was very productive. Certainly he was very much recognized in the 1970s when the world global population took off.

Of course, it may be argued just a little bit, if you think about Malthus and his thesis going back, I believe, into the 1700s. His philosophy was that the world population would expand to fill the kind of technology of the day we had to produce food. If we hadn't come up with this technology, maybe the population wouldn't be increasing quite so rapidly, but we also know what the result of that would have been, and it would have been starvation. That's what would have limited the population.

Back in 1950 the global production of grain was in the neighbourhood of 692 million tons on an annual basis for a population of approximately 2.2 billion. By 1992, that production had increased to 1.9 billion tons of grain, and that was to feed a population of 5.6 billion. We increased the grain production 2.8 times and we increased the population by only 2.2. Obviously more people were being

fed with a better quality diet. The global grain yields on a per acre basis have increased over that time period from about 0.45 tons per acres to 1.1 tons per acre.

As we look around Ontario and see some farms disappearing and we see some reverting to habitat for wildlife, the media develops a crisis about vanishing farms, when in fact the high-yield agriculture that is going on is very environmentally friendly, very favourable to developing and maintaining our wildlife habitat.

Just to quote from Borlaug himself, he stated, "Without high-yield farming, either millions would have starved or losses of pristine land would be 100 times greater than all losses to urban and suburban expansion." I think that's a quote very worth hanging on to.

If we were to feed today's population with organic farming, or the way we were doing it back in the 1940s and early 1950s, we would have to put under the plow another 10 million square miles, or put another way, we're saving that many from being plowed today. That equals, just for simplicity, about 1.5 times the size of South America.

If you were to project the population growth we have, we would be looking at putting another 25 million to 30 million square miles under the plow by 2050, and that's an area equal to North America, Europe and most of Asia. So it's certainly significant what high-yield agriculture is doing for the population of the world, especially the size we have today.

I mentioned a few minutes ago the support of OMAFRA and the Ontario government for research and development, and particularly OMAFRA through the University of Guelph: tremendous potential for biotechnology and what it can do to reduce the quantity of pesticides used. We don't need to put pesticides on nearly the number of acres. For example, we've tripled the production of corn, and therefore those two acres that do not get any pesticides are two acres that are left for wildlife habitat. Good biotechnology has reduced the quantity of antibiotics needed. It has reduced the soil erosion problems just because there's far less under the plow.

1140

There's a great industry in biotechnology. The potential by the year 2000 is for an industry of some $46 billion. In Canada in 1993, it was in the neighbourhood of $50 million and rising, and still on the increase.

There have certainly been a lot of interesting developments in biotechnology, including cloning, as mentioned by the member for Halton North, when Dolly was born. That raises all kinds of moral issues in our human population: Just how do we handle this kind of thing? We've handled many others. Recently we heard that you can take human embryos in the very early stages and examine them for some 27 various genetic defects and therefore save some people from some very, very serious genetic problems.

These are just some of the examples of biotechnology that's out there, that's working. We've evolved a long way in the last century because of it. I look forward to further research in biotechnology and therefore enthusiastically support the resolution being put forward by my friend from Halton North.

Ms Annamarie Castrilli (Downsview): Is there any doubt that science and technology have had a very positive and critical effect on our society? Is there any doubt that there's a high correlation between the kinds of products that have been created, the kind of research that has been done, and the quality of life that we now enjoy? Is there any doubt that research and technology are not just the domain of some academics in ivory towers, but are very real in our lives by creating jobs and by creating products which are worthwhile for us? Just a small example, a statistic that I think continually shocks many people: For every dollar that is spent in science, about $5 is generated in spinoff products, everything from transistors to better agricultural strains.

So this resolution is timely. The private member's resolution notes that the government has a responsibility and a critical role to play in the funding of science. That, of course, is a position that the Liberal Party has always taken and that I endorse. The fact is that many of the experiments that are required to be undertaken simply cannot be done without funding, and that funding will normally, most naturally, come from a government that is committed to the betterment of society.

Having said that, I think all of us have to pause and look at the record of this government and be shocked by what has happened since they took office. I'll be very brief and I'll simply cite for the record some of the statistics that I think will illustrate the point.

One of the very first things they did was to cancel a grant of $1.7 million to the Ottawa Life Sciences Council, a move that the director of the council said was "a serious blow" because the council had expected those funds to attract a further $9 million in private sector investment in companies working together to create medical devices and other biotechnology products.

Almost from the word go, there was little appreciation of the importance of science and technology, and biotechnology as well. Perhaps I could just cite from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the estimates that have been tabled with the Legislature over the last three years.

If you look at the centres of excellence program, in 1995-96 it was reduced 2%; in 1996-97, another 2%; in 1997-98, another 9%.

The industry research program, 1995-96, 16% eliminated; 1996-97, a further 40%; 1997-98, a further 28%.

International agreements — those are agreements that are entered into with three countries in particular; it's a joint committee of researchers to expand areas of scientific and industrial exchange — 1995-96, 23% cut; 1996-97, 27% cut; 1997-98, 28% cut.

We move to the Radarsat program: totally eliminated in 1995-96 with the coming into power of this government.

The science and technology awareness program: totally eliminated in 1995-96.

The technical personnel program in 1995-96 was cut by 14%; in 1996-97, 52%; in 1997-98, 27% in addition to the other cuts.

The technology and adjustment research program in 1995-96 was cut by 62%; in 1996-97, by 93%; and eliminated totally in 1997-98.

The university research incentive fund in 1995-96 was reduced by 19%; in 1996-77, by 77%; in 1997-98, a further 78%. It went from a $3-million budget to $178,000.

This is shocking, quite frankly. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs can stand up and say that they have done so much in this sector, but the reality speaks otherwise. The reality is that this government has very little commitment to science and technology. I applaud the member for bringing his government to task. I hope he can do more than just pass a resolution. Let's have some real programs.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I'm pleased to be able to speak to this resolution today. I don't know a lot about biotechnology; I have to admit that. A number of years ago I did read a book by Jeremy Rifkin about more animal research, I think it was, animal biotechnology, where some alarming and unpredicted things happened to animals. The animals were being genetically changed and altered. Some of these animals ended up — I don't want to describe it here — just terribly deformed and in a lot of pain. I guess what it has to remind us is that we're dealing with nature here, that we're altering nature. When we do that, we have to be very, very careful.

The paragraph in this resolution that I like and that is significant for me and I believe allows me to be able to support this resolution is the second-last paragraph that says, "The government...should recognize the importance of safe and cost-effective biotechnology and support well-researched science in advancing Ontario's agriculture and food production...."

I don't know if people here are aware, but I know there is a major controversy in Europe, in the European Union, about genetically engineered crops. It's true they are further ahead of us there, so they've now reaped some of the rewards, but they've also seen some of the problems. The concern is about whether or not there has been enough research done to introduce certain varieties at the commercial level, which is what's been happening, and there have been problems.

In Canada, one of the few areas that I do know something about is that you may recall that there were genetically altered seeds in a canola variety of crop and then the product had to be withdrawn because it did not contain some of the genetic materials that the company that developed said were in it. That turned out to be a big problem, and that's an example of something that can go wrong if the research isn't done properly and isn't well verified.

We're hearing a lot today about the federal government because of downsizing and cutting and all kinds of, I suppose, other reasons. There's some controversy about Agrifood at the federal level creating a new food agency. I understand that they will be charged with the evolution of new foods. Now, this could possibly be a good thing. There could be problems as well, but certainly Agrifood now is a bit like the Ministry of Natural Resources on the provincial level: They have a conflict of interest.

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Agrifood has been very involved with the development of these new strains, these new genetic materials, the development of new foods, but they're also the regulator, as we see here with the Ministry of Natural Resources, for instance, having the Niagara Escarpment Commission turned over to them. They also are advocates for the aggregate or gravel industry. We see that real conflict here, and that is a conflict with Agrifood. As we get more and more into development — new strains, new genetically altered crops — it's very important that governments don't just look at the bottom line for the big corporations or at developing these new genetic materials, new foods, but that there is a strong regulatory body in place that makes sure the proper research has been done.

I know a little more about this as well; I believe it's soybeans. There was a genetically altered soybean which was designed to resist certain kinds of pesticides — I believe it was Roundup — and it works. You can spray tons of the stuff out of the sky from an airplane into the crop and the soybeans have been genetically altered so they can survive it, but everything else in the field can't.

You might think this is a good thing. I don't think it is. I don't think that developing crops that become totally dependent on dangerous pesticides, which is something we're trying to phase out, is a good idea. Of course, you have the added problem that as you develop more and more of these genetically engineered crops which can be resistant to certain kinds of sprays, well, guess what happens over time? A new kind of bug is developed. The bug will evolve to such an extent that it's a new, different breed of bug which can resist the particular chemical. It will not be bugged by it, in other words. Then you've got a whole new problem. You've got a whole new bug and you've got technology that's going to have to be created to deal with that.

I'm just pointing this out because I believe that in the process of developing more and more biotechnology, genetically altered seeds, you are playing with nature, and there are things, as has been discovered in Europe, that can go very wrong. The part of this resolution that I believe is important, which I will reiterate, is "support well-researched science." The Ontario government has to make sure there's an arm's-length body making sure that not just the short-term corporate bottom line is being looked at, but that consumer protection and the long-term viability of the many varieties of crops we have now will remain, because that is another danger as you develop more and more of these genetically altered crops. They've seen that in Europe as well. What happens is that some of the crops that exist today start to slip away. They disappear. You could end up losing a lot of the diversity within the agricultural system, which also is something that needs to be looked at.

I support the resolution. I'm sorry I didn't hear the mover of the motion, but I've read it and I support the words of the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Environment and Energy to some extent. I believe we have to explore this, but I want to make sure that the money and the effort is put into the research so we know what we're getting into, so we know we're not putting crops out there which will cause huge problems later. That is the real danger, and I believe you would agree with that. With a proper regulatory system in place and good research, this should be carried through.

Mr Harry Danford (Hastings-Peterborough): I rise this morning in support of the member's resolution on biotechnology. It's encouraging to me that the agrifood industry is working hard to help ensure that we will all reap the benefits of new foods that are being, or will be, introduced into the marketplace. As a government, we have to make sure that we have a strong, more competitive agrifood sector. This will mean more job creation, investment attraction and certainly export development. The member for Halton Centre recognizes one of the tools that can help strengthen the agrifood sector.

He also raises some very important issues in his resolution. Almost every day there are stories in the newspapers or on TV about biotechnology. What is clear is that the agrifood industry must not only be responsible for the development of this emerging science but be seen to be responsible. I believe that by working with the industry we can do a better job both in developing food product innovations that meet consumer demand and in communicating the benefits of these innovations to the public.

This will benefit everyone, because that's the way we do things here in Ontario. Industry partnerships are beneficial in several ways, not the least of which is making good use of the research being conducted. There are several examples of this kind of cooperation already under way.

The Ontario government has partnered with the Food and Consumer Products Manufacturers of Canada. That will see the results of consumer research previously conducted in Canada, and indeed in other countries, combined with the information gathered here in Ontario. This was done through a grant from Grow Ontario. This government is supportive of any advancement that gives consumers what they want and deserve, namely, a wider choice of safe, high-quality food products.

I'd like to give the members an idea of the depth of support that OMAFRA already gives to biotechnology. In 1996, approximately $3.3 million of the total $39-million research budget was allocated to biotechnology research. Last summer the ministry launched a 1-800 number — 1-888-ONT-AGRI — to make it easier for investors and researchers to obtain information about the province's biotechnology industry.

We are an important part of Ontario agrifood technologies, a not-for-profit corporation aimed at coordinating and promoting the commercialization of technologies and products derived from biotechnology research. OAFT was launched in January and includes representatives of universities, agriculture groups, banks, agrifood companies and government. The ministry has committed $1 million over five years to this cooperative effort and is represented on its board of directors. It may interest members to know that the head of OAFT is Dr Murray McLaughlin, one of Canada's leading experts in biotechnology.

I would like to ask all the members of this House to support the member's resolution on biotechnology. As a government, we will continue to support biotechnology as a tool to allow the agriculture and food industry to prosper in the province of Ontario.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): In the short time I have to address this resolution put forward by the member for Halton North, I thought I'd focus in on one aspect. I want to read it because it's so important: "Given that in a world of change, if government and industry fail to form strategic partnerships and lead the way as innovators towards this 21st-century industry, they face being driven out of the competitive global marketplace."

This government has yet to adopt any strategic partnerships with Ontario's colleges and universities as far as research is concerned. The Conservatives have called for research to be driven by the interests of private sector business, with little regard for basic research — and as you know, that is extremely necessary — before any applied research can occur. They've not done any of that.

"The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs," the resolution says, "should provide leadership and support to Ontario biotech initiatives and recognize their importance to future opportunities for growth, jobs and investment and continue to coordinate and support biotech research and development."

I want to bring to the attention of the member and the ministers too, especially the Minister of Education, that the Smith report was presented. They had two reports: One was presented in December 1996, and the second one, on research, in May 1997. Yet we have not had any response. I just want to remind him that that report called for an increase in the research overhead infrastructure envelope, which is now at $23 million. The government responded energetically and put it to $27 million. What they asked for in the Smith report was that it should have gone to $100 million. They put a mere $4 million on it and said, "We are moving forward." It's quite inadequate.

1200

The report also recommended that the province develop a research policy covering basic and applied research and encompassing both the public and the private sector. As you know, I heard many of the members echoing the fact that this is a good step. The fact is that you have excluded universities, one of the most important partners in all of this research. There is no mention whatsoever of universities. Why would you exclude the universities, where actually most of the research is being developed?

While I support this resolution, because I can see what the member for Halton North is saying, his frustration, that the minister has got to get on with it and do his work and, as members have said, not only put the right amount of funds into research so the work can be done, my em-

phasis also is that the universities be included in all of what they're doing, because that's where it should be.

The Smith report released a framework for research policy for Ontario. It said that emphatically. Among the 20 sections, Smith recognized the value of the challenge fund and the tax credit announced in the budget and repeated the advisory panel's finding that base funding for research in Ontario is seriously deficient. If you recognize that, how can you move forward into the 21st century while pulling back so much of that money from research and development? The framework argues for clear public statements on the importance of research. You have not yet done any of that.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize very much that if this government is serious about promoting not only the development of biotechnology but also basic and applied research which would benefit all Ontarians, it should begin by implementing the research recommendations of its own report on research policy. The first step is to acknowledge the report; the second step is to act on it. A key component on acting on this report is clear: Talk to the colleges and universities of Ontario and include them in the planning and implementation of a research policy.

So far we have heard from many universities; they have come before me and have said that somehow they are being excluded from any sort of consultation that is meaningful. I commend you for bringing this forward and I commend you for telling the minister to get on with it and do his job.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Halton North, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr Chudleigh: It's a very short period of time to cover such a large subject, but I would thank the member for Essex South for his comments and refer him to the comments of the member for Hastings-Peterborough, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, as to the support the minister continues to give to the food and agricultural industry in Ontario.

The member for Windsor-Riverside indicated that this is a motherhood-type statement. It may well be inside this House, but let me tell you that it represents a strong statement to companies around the world that are involved in research and development in the biotechnology industry. They want to go and locate in provinces where they are needed and wanted. Ontario supports these initiatives, and the best researchers are attracted to those areas which have a benevolent climate to these types of developments.

The fears that are expressed by a number of members are perhaps indicative of the lack of understanding that many people in this country have, in that we take our food supply so much for granted. We expect our food supply to be safe. That doesn't happen by accident; it happens because we have one of the best food inspection and food development systems in the world, a system that is copied by other nations around the world and one which we should be extremely proud of. The quality of Canadian and Ontario foods in particular is never at risk, and it's something that I take great pride in. I think if you go to visit other countries where you have some concerns about the foods you eat, you'd never express those concerns when you're eating food at home.

I thank the member for Northumberland for his kind remarks. Dr Galt is perhaps, among us, the best qualified to give an opinion on these types of research, and his unqualified support of this resolution is indeed appreciated in this case.

The member for Downsview talked about the funding. The focus of our funding, as the member for Hastings-Peterborough pointed out, is far more targeted than it has been in the past, and I think that targeting of research dollars will make much better use of them.

I'd just say briefly that the member for Riverdale indicated that she honestly didn't know much about the subject, and I'd leave her comments at that. I thank the House for your support.

HUMBER RIVER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): We will deal first with ballot item 99 standing in the name of Mr Shea. Mr Shea has introduced private member's notice of motion 73. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

BIOTECHNOLOGY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): We will now deal with ballot item 100 in the name of Mr Chudleigh. Mr Chudleigh has introduced private member's notice of motion 70. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

All matters related to private members' business have been dealt with. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1207 to 1331.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): I have in my hand a news release issued September 22, 1997, by the St Thomas detachment of the OPP from which I would like to quote. It reads:

"With less than one month into the school year, the Elgin County OPP have received numerous complaints of vehicles failing to stop for school buses when they are picking up or dropping off children." It goes on to say: "The consequences for failing to stop for the bus when it has its 'bus signals' activated can be disastrous. A child could be severely injured or killed because you were either not paying attention or in such a hurry that you thought you could beat the...signals" on the bus.

Not three months ago a child was killed in a school bus accident near St Thomas.

Mr Palladini refuses to give the law teeth. He refuses to give the law a mechanism to convict drivers who pass school buses illegally. Raising fines is not enough to protect children. Your bill is a failure, Minister. There is no deterrent. Your job is to protect innocent children, not guilty drivers. Police should not have to beg drivers to heed the law. Lives are at stake. Pass vehicle liability.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I rise again in reference to the Plastimet fire in Hamilton and the absolute need for a public inquiry. I want to preface my remarks by saying that we have a tradition in Hamilton, a very proud history, that when it comes to community matters, regardless of the level of government and regardless of the party affiliation, we unite around each other and around a common cause. I've seen that since I've been in public office for 12 years now and I know it was there before I arrived.

I also referred yesterday to an editorial in Saturday's Hamilton Spectator, the fifth one, I might add, that spoke to a number of the questions that are outstanding. It refers to the fact that both Dominic Agostino and myself have called for the inquiry but that we are opposition. Then they go on to say:

"Lillian Ross, Trevor Pettit, Toni Skarica, Cam Jackson, Ed Doyle: Where are you? What do you think? Do you agree with Sterling and Wilson that calls for an inquiry are much ado about nothing? How about you, Premier Harris?

"Where do you stand on a short, concise, authoritative investigation into the Plastimet fire?"

I rise today to remind the Minister of Environment that one of his own members, Trevor Pettit, is on side with this issue. The minister keeps saying it's about politics and it's about partisan politics. The reality is that it is about community, it is about safety and it is about finding answers and making sure it doesn't happen again. I'm glad to see Trevor Pettit is on side. Now where are the other Tory MPPs? Where are they on this issue? Where are you standing up for our communities?

ONTARIO APPLES

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Despite the hot, dry conditions farmers experienced this summer, all indications are that this year's apple harvest will be the second-largest in Ontario's history.

According to the Ontario Apple Marketing Commission, Ontario's producers expect to harvest about 15 million bushels of apples this fall. McIntosh, Empire and Red Delicious appear to be well above last year in volume. These are the three main varieties grown in Ontario, but we have lots of Spartan, Courtland, Northern Spy and Golden Delicious apples as well.

Now that I have everyone's attention focused on their stomachs, I'd like to remind the honourable members and the public that one of the premier apple festivals is set to take place this weekend. It's called the Brighton Applefest, and I'm proud to invite everyone to come to Brighton and enjoy a slice of what Northumberland apple producers have to offer.

The apple growers of Ontario are indeed an important component of our farming industry, especially in Northumberland, where the scenic apple route winds through miles of roadways lined with apple orchards.

The Big Apple at Colborne and the Applefest in Brighton make it a perfect destination for a fall drive in the country. That is all the more true this weekend, as we celebrate another great apple harvest in Ontario.

FAMINE IN NORTH KOREA

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): Today at Metro Hall in Toronto, a group of outstanding Canadians called Canadians for North Korean Famine Relief met to call for help for the famine in North Korea.

North Korea has experienced four straight years of significant natural disasters. The result has been a massive shortage of food and it is having a devastating impact, particularly on young people. The estimates of the death toll indicate that there are tens of thousands of young people dying of starvation in North Korea.

I appreciate that we have our own challenges in dealing with issues here in Ontario, but Ontario has always had a generous and caring attitude that responds to these enormous human tragedies, even when they are far removed geographically.

I understand the Bank of Montreal has agreed to accept donations. I have asked the Premier to consider providing some coordinating assistance on behalf of the people of Ontario. I recognize the challenges of a provincial government providing international relief, but certainly Ontario has responded to situations like this in Italy and Poland and Jamaica. I think Ontario could provide some coordinating activities. I realize that many of us disagree violently with the North Korean government, but in this case it is young people who are suffering terribly.

I would encourage, as always, Ontarians to have that caring, compassionate heart and to provide some assistance.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Make no mistake about it: This government hurts kids. Its cuts to funding in education have forced five- and six-year-old youngsters in Niagara South in the Welland area to face hour-long rides to and from school, including kindergarten students. One parent reported to the Niagara South Board of Education earlier this week that his child actually spends more time on the bus than he does in the classroom with his half-day of kindergarten.

The Niagara South Board of Education has made it clear that it's as a direct result of the cuts in education funding of this government that it has had to eliminate some 25 buses and amalgamate bus runs, creating these

longer and longer distances for five- and six-year-olds to travel.

This government simply doesn't understand that its cuts to education, along with a whole lot of other things, including health care, all in the name of funding a phoney tax break, two thirds of which is going to go to the top 10% of income earners, hurt some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

This government is prepared to attack the welfare of five- and six-year-old youngsters on their way to school and their way back home again so that those youngsters can be called upon to help pay for the phoney tax break.

When is this government going to understand that its policies are hurting people, hurting innocent people, hurting youngsters and their parents and grandparents, none of whom deserve to be attacked in the manner that this government is attacking them? I say shame on this government. When will it finally listen to the people of this province?

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FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): My constituents want their government to be responsible and accountable, and I as their representative am here to help make this happen. Next Thursday I'll be introducing a private member's resolution to the House which asks that fiscal responsibility be compulsory for the province of Ontario.

Following the balancing of the budget by this government in the year 2000-01, my constituents and I would like to see legislation that would make it mandatory for future governments to balance their budgets and not overspend. I look forward to receiving support for this endeavour from the members of this Legislature, as I receive much support from the people of the great riding of Perth.

In 1995 the people of the province stated clearly that the time for government overspending had to end, governments should be accountable and spend within their means. They gave the job of straightening out the province's finances to the Mike Harris team, and I'm proud to say that we are succeeding.

As the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Ernie Eves, announced recently, we are on or ahead of schedule to balance the budget and we're witnessing the return of jobs, hope, growth and opportunity in Ontario.

The people of the riding of Perth made it clear to me during the election and afterwards that they wanted a provincial government that could provide quality service at a reasonable cost. They saw themselves living within their means while being forced to support a government that could not do the same.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): This morning we had reported that the medical director of trauma and the chief of emergency medicine at Hôtel Dieu and Windsor hospital are resigning effective the end of this year because, in their words, they can no longer be held responsible for what goes on in that emergency ward.

Another one of the doctors indicated that they are concerned and confused by the government and the government's inaction with respect to restructuring in the Windsor area.

Months ago, March of 1996, the Minister of Health for the government of Ontario acknowledged that money needed to be reinvested in the Windsor emergency rooms, indeed across Windsor's remaining hospitals, to accommodate the changes.

As of today, not one penny of that money has flowed. Patients' health is at risk, the quality of care in our community is at risk, and the minister hides behind the Health Services Restructuring Commission, which we now know is no more independent than any other of the façades this government has established.

Emergency care for patients in Windsor is at risk, health care for Windsorites is at risk. If this minister is not prepared to deal with it in a proper and expeditious manner, the minister ought to resign, and he ought to resign immediately.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): I've been following with great interest the Minister of Education's about-face on the length of the school year. I found it really striking to hear that the main reason he's backing down on his proposal to bring students into school a week before Labour Day is that his rural colleagues have talked to him in the last few days and they're very concerned about starting school before Labour Day. "There's a real problem in the farm community," the minister is quoted as saying. That of course is a very astute observation on the part of this minister.

What I find most striking is that what this tells us is that even the Conservative caucus members are more and more being shut out of decisions as the minister continues to ram through his $1 billion in cuts across the province. Because we know that at the end of the day, while the minister will continue to fudge back and forth, while he will continue to play with numbers, play with figures and play with days of the school year, his basic bottom line is to take $1 billion out of the system.

I just want to say to my Conservative colleagues opposite that I hope now you're beginning to twig to what the real agenda is, that in the same way you've brought the minister to his senses on this question of the school year, you will also bring him to his senses on the insanity of proceeding to cut another $1 billion out of the school system, because that would wreck greatly the system we have in place now.

TEAM CANADA 1972

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): It is truly an honour today to rise in the Legislature to recognize the anniversary of a milestone event in Canadian sports

history. September 28, 1972, at about 4:45 pm Canadian time, history was made. Everyone in Canada knows where they were at that moment. This was history — Canadian history. What government hasn't been able to do, a group of gutsy, spirited, fierce Canadians accomplished. Across the nation people jumped for joy and spontaneously sang O Canada.

Our nation was united as Team Canada '72 won the summit hockey series against the Soviets with only 34 seconds to go in the deciding game. Hearts, guts and spirit prevailed. Yvan Cournoyer, Serge Savard, Rod Seiling, Ron Ellis, Ken Dryden, Bobby Clarke and a whole host of great hockey players: just a few of the guys who never quit playing Canada's game the only way they knew how. We won. We beat them. Canada won. Shortly in the gallery we will have some of the members of Team Canada.

At the Ice Palace in Moscow, I sang O Canada with the 3,000 fans there. It was a passionate and proud O Canada, followed by, "We're number one." I was there. I was covering the series for the Toronto Sun. I remember the Russians taking away our horns. I remember them staring in amazement at a native Canadian in full head dress. I remember the snow in early September, the lineups, the hardships. The cry was, "Da, da, Canada; nyet, nyet, Soviet." We're number one, and with glowing hearts they did stand on guard for thee. They fought a war and they won.

This weekend marks the 25th anniversary of the summit series for hockey supremacy. The Soviets won two, lost one and tied one in Canada. After losing the first game in Russia, Team Canada had to win them all, and we did. Some of those players are here with us today and I honour them. Yes, thank you for uniting Canada. Thank you for exemplifying the Canadian spirit. Thank you for showing the world Canadian skill, guts, grit, spirit and heart —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I would have let you go on, but the member for Durham East wants you to sit down. Sorry.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to let him finish his statement? Agreed.

Mr Jim Brown: Thank you.

Thank you, Team Canada, for uniting Canada. Thank you for exemplifying the Canadian spirit. You will long be remembered not only for what you did, but how you did it: in adversity, on foreign shores, with your backs to the wall and with sheer determination. I don't think Canadians will ever forget. Thank you, Team Canada, for making us very proud Canadians.

I will be tabling a resolution calling on the Ontario Legislature to support the inclusion of Team Canada '72, the whole team, in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: I gave you notice of my intent to raise a point of privilege. I apologize that I wasn't able to give you further details, given the short time line and the fact that this just came up this morning. It's a point that I believe is quite a serious infringement not just of my own privileges as a member, but of those of committee members as a whole.

As I indicated in my notice to you, it relates to an issue that arose this morning in the general government committee. That committee is charged, as you know, by order of the House with holding hearings last week, today, and then clause by clause next Thursday on Bill 148, which is the companion bill to Bill 103, the megacity bill.

One of the groups that appeared before us last week at the request of the committee was the transition team. Because the committee was not able to hear them for the full time because of disruptions that happened in the morning of last week, there was agreement that the transition team members would return today during the second day of hearings.

This morning at the committee we learned that they would not be coming, and I put a motion to the committee, which the committee passed, to have the Chair or the clerk again contact the transition team and request that they attend. I did that at the time, as I explained, because I believe very strongly that the transition team, as a group that is appointed by order in council, as a group that's dealing with the issues of implementation of the megacity, is crucial to be at the committee for us to complete our questioning of them so that we, as the committee that is dealing with Bill 148, which also has as its main objective the bringing about of the megacity, have the opportunity to question them on the work they are doing.

The refusal of the members of the transition team to attend I think raises a serious question and a serious issue about our abilities as members of the Legislature to do our work, and that is compounded when two things happen which are true in this case.

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The first is when it is a committee that has requested that presence; it's not an individual member of the committee that wants to have a particular group of people there.

Second, I believe it is fundamental when we are dealing, as we are here, with a body that is appointed by order in council — it's not a group of citizens out there, it's not elected people at other levels of government; it's a body that is appointed by order in council and a body that is dealing more directly and is dealing exactly with the nature of the issue that's in front on the committee, which is the transition to the megacity.

I think it poses serious limitations and hence causes an infringement on not only my rights as a member of that committee but indeed other members' rights to be able to properly do our work if there is an outright refusal by those individuals to attend to the committee. I ask you, Speaker, to rule on that.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Let me just say first, before the government House leader gets up, that I, as Speaker of this House, will not hear nor am I allowed

to rule on points of privilege at committees. Those are to be taken up at committees.

If the committee determines that they would like me to hear points of privilege, they then have to report to this House by way of the committee itself. If the committee chooses to report here, I can hear it, but until that takes place, I can't hear a point of privilege taken by an individual member at the committee level.

Further, there is a process by which a witness may be compelled to attend before a committee, but such a process again requires a motion properly made and passed by this House.

In essence, I say to the member for Dovercourt, your argument or discussion need be taken up at the committee level. If you don't find success there, the committee then must request the Speaker to hear submissions with respect to the point of privilege. Until that time happens, until I receive that request from the committee as a whole, I cannot seize the issue.

Mr Silipo: May I just rise on a very brief point?

The Speaker: A brief point, the member for Dovercourt.

Mr Silipo: I would just point out to you that I raised the issue of privilege this morning with the Chair of the committee. I was told, and I believe the Chair of the committee was correct in doing this, that he has no authority to deal with questions of privilege. I hope you can appreciate the position that this puts individual members of the committee in.

I hear and I appreciate your point that the committee can make certain decisions. But what it does is it leaves this vacuum, then, if a member is told that a committee Chair does not have the authority to rule on a question of privilege and that the only resort is to the Speaker, and the Speaker says that I have to go back to the committee Chair. If that's what you're telling me to do, then fine, that's what I will do. Otherwise, you're creating a vacuum here in which the committee Chair says, "Go talk to the Speaker," and the Speaker says, "Go talk to the committee Chair."

The Speaker: Let me just help you clarify the Chair of the committee's ruling. He or she — I'm not even sure who it is, to be honest — from what I understand is fundamentally saying the same thing that I'm saying. In essence, if they are to hear the point of privilege at the committee, they must do so by the committee, if they want to report it out to this House. They can't do it by an individual member, that particular point of privilege. I believe what they're telling you is that the only way to hear this point of privilege at this level, in this place, is for the committee to report it out here.

Mr Silipo: Speaker, I'm not arguing on that point. What I'm seeking some clarification on is that it seems to me what you are saying is that as an individual member I do not have the right to raise a point of privilege at a committee of this House and have the committee Chair rule on whether there is or is not a point of privilege, because what I was told by the Chair this morning was that he could not rule on that.

The Speaker: I understand the point you are making, that your point of privilege in committee was made, but the Chair ruled that they couldn't hear your point of privilege and they suggested you take it up here.

Mr Silipo: That's right, and that the only person who could deal with it was you.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): That's not true.

The Speaker: Order. You've got to withdraw that comment. You can't say that. You should know that, member for Scarborough East. You can't say that.

Mr Gilchrist: I didn't —

The Speaker: No, you said, "That's not true." I heard you very clearly say that.

Interjections: Withdraw, withdraw.

Mr Gilchrist: I certainly withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: You're going to have to give me an opportunity to review it and see exactly what happened, to review the situation and report back. It's only fair. I don't want to get all this information at this place, at this time. I think I should try and get the information myself on a firsthand basis, if the member for Dovercourt would allow me that opportunity. I will report back subsequently.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I'd like to take this time at this point to introduce some guests in the Speaker's gallery. I'd like to inform the members of the Legislative Assembly that we have in the Speaker's gallery today a South African parliamentary delegation. Please welcome them.

We also have in the gallery today, whom the member for Scarborough West was speaking about earlier, five members of Team Canada 1972: Mr Rod Seiling, Mr Ron Ellis, Mr Yvan Cournoyer, Mr Frank Mahovlich and Mr Bill White. Welcome, gentlemen. And the waterboy, Mr Jim Bradley.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION REFORM

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): My question is for the Minister of Education. We have just learned that teachers across this province are ready to take job action in response to your attacks on them and on education. They are ready to go on strike and you are about to get the fight you've been looking for. This is a very frightening time. It's a frightening time for students, who are worried about their education; it's a frightening time for parents, who are worried about their kids and about how they're going to manage. It's a frightening time for the teachers, who feel that you have driven them to this.

You have the crisis you set out to create. You've played a game of brinkmanship. You've taken students and parents to the edge of the precipice. I ask you this

afternoon, will you pull back from the brink? Will you back off your $1 billion of cuts? Will you back away from firing 6,000 teachers? Will you do this now before it is too late to avoid this crisis?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I think the member for Fort William will know that a matter of weeks ago I went to Niagara-on-the-Lake. I met with the heads of the unions that represent teachers in Ontario and I asked them that day, as I would ask them again today, to reduce the level of rhetoric, to reduce all the sabre rattling, to come in and talk with us and find resolutions to the problems we have so that we can get that better system of education for our students. I think that's the responsible way of doing things.

I believe that at this point in time it would be useful for the member for Fort William, and indeed every member of this chamber, to take that same approach, to take the approach of saying, "Let's have a look at the issues that we have and let's find the solution."

This government heard the teachers' request regarding the importance of their right to strike and we honoured that. We heard their request in terms of having principals remain in the bargaining unit and we honoured that request. We listened.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Snobelen: We heard their request in terms of their right to represent teachers and we honoured that request. We have a track record of listening carefully to what people have to say, and we'll continue that.

1400

Mrs McLeod: You said you would talk to teachers, but in fact you laid down ultimatums. Your ultimatum came right down to cutting $1 billion more out of education and firing thousands of teachers, and that ultimatum is still on the table today. You are talking about saving money by having some 6,000 fewer teachers. You don't improve education by having 6,000 fewer teachers. You don't improve education by having fewer teachers teaching more students and more classes. This is not about improving education. This is only about cutting money so that you can pay for your tax cut. It has always been about paying for your tax cut.

I ask you again today, will you back off your plan to cut $1 billion out of education? Will you back off your plan to cut more than 6,000 teachers? For the sake of our students, will you do this now?

Hon Mr Snobelen: It's exactly that kind of theatrics that I think raises the boiling temperature in the province of Ontario. It's exactly that kind of rhetoric. It's not useful for our students. It's not useful for improving education.

The member opposite should know that we have introduced in this House a bill that, if it passes, would have the effect of allowing us to cap the growth in class size — the growth in class size that happened while your government was in power, that happened while your government was in power in response to the social contract, some 7% increase in class sizes.

Our government wants to make sure that doesn't happen for and on behalf of our students in this province. We want to make sure their instructional time, their time on topic, their time on subject in school increases. We want to make sure that teachers get to spend most of their time with their students in class, where education happens, on what's important to our students. That's the purpose of the bill we put before this House. I think the public of Ontario knows that.

The Speaker: Answer, please.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I'd encourage the member for Fort William to communicate that, communicate it right across Ontario, because it's important for our students.

Mrs McLeod: Minister, you've been trying to pick a fight with Ontario teachers from the time you became Minister of Education. You have described teachers as being underworked and overpaid. You have consistently devalued teachers. You have tried to portray everything that is done outside the classroom as being administrative waste. You've accused teachers of being lazy and unprofessional and you've been eager to see professional teachers replaced by non-teachers so you could save money. You have pushed teachers into a confrontation and now you are going to get one, and the issues on the table are $1 billion more out of education and 6,000 fewer teachers.

Minister, I say to you, this is not about who gets the best spin; this is not about who wins. This is about students and their need to be in school. Clearly you are not ready to resolve this crisis you have created, and I don't believe you can. Will you step aside so someone else can?

Hon Mr Snobelen: For the third time today I'm going to ask the member for Fort William to drop the rhetoric. The member for Fort William knows that I have never said any of those things about teachers. The member for Fort William knows that I'm on record from day one in this ministry as saying that I have the highest regard for the profession of teaching and for teachers. She knows that I have from day one on this job said consistently, day after day after day in this House, that teachers are the backbone of our education system.

I believe our system has failed teachers. I don't think it's given them the support they need to make the difference they want to make with their students, and that's why step by step we're building a better education system for Ontario.

The member for Fort William perhaps would like to take the time today to stand up and withdraw her comments, because clearly they're contrary to the record that's very clear, established by this minister and this government, in support of the teachers and the students and the parents in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): Minister of Education, it's obvious to everyone but to you that you should step aside and do so immediately. You've lost all credibility. One day you announce that you're extending the school year, and then you wake up the next morning and announce: "Oops, I've made a mistake. I've changed my mind." Whom did you consult? It wasn't parents, it wasn't teachers, it wasn't students. It was your Tory back bench. That's who you consulted.

You've created nothing but chaos and confusion. It's time you realize it's time for you to step aside. Minister, will you do the right thing today and step aside because you've lost any credibility with the people of this province?

Hon Mr Snobelen: On behalf of my colleagues, who together have worked very hard over the course of the last couple of years to take on the tough questions, to take on the tough issues in education, to take on a system that had a funding mechanism that left some students as second-class citizens in this province, that had no measures of performance, no measures of quality, that had allowed students and teachers to be trapped in mediocrity — that's what the system of education that we inherited had done.

My colleagues and I have worked very hard to take on the tough questions to help build a better system for our students. That's what we all want. I'm proud of our record. I'm proud of building step by step that system for our children and I'll remain proud of it as we go through the reading of this next bill.

Mr Cordiano: Minister, how can anyone believe you when you keep changing your mind? You say you'll protect classroom size, and you want to get rid of 6,000 teachers. You talk about improving education and then you want to take another $1 billion out of the system. One day you play hardball with the teachers and the next you want to sit down and talk to them, and then you're back to playing hardball.

No one's fooled. Everything you have to say is nothing but a snow job. You've lost all credibility. I ask you again, when will you step aside and let someone else take over who can do the job properly? Step aside, Minister.

Hon Mr Snobelen: The honourable member opposite and I might disagree on the type of job. Perhaps the member opposite believes the government of the day should not ask tough questions, that perhaps the government of the day should not ask, why is it our students perform in the middle of the pack on international and pan-Canadian tests? Why is it our costs are higher than other provinces, while our student performance is lower? Why is it our elementary school teachers in Ontario spend as much time in class as their colleagues across Canada — they are at the national average in terms of the time they spend in class with students — but our secondary school teachers are at the lowest time in terms of the amount of time they spend in class?

Those are tough questions and I appreciate that, but they're asked not on behalf of this government, they're asked on behalf of the future of the students of this province. I believe that's what a responsible government does; it asks the tough questions and it listens to the responses.

Mr Cordiano: You are the Minister of Education for the province of Ontario. When you say something — and don't forget that — people have the right to expect that you've done your homework and that you know what you're talking about. But you want everybody to believe that two plus two equals five. Let me give you the basic math. Classrooms minus teachers minus funding equals lousy education. That's what you're giving the parents and teachers of this province, and the students are going to have to put up with that. That's why I'm asking you again to step aside. Lousy education is unacceptable for the students of this province. Will you do the right thing and step aside?

Hon Mr Snobelen: There's maybe a more fundamental equation the member opposite would like to keep in mind. It is simple: mediocre education plus high debt — the $41,000 per student in debt you left every student in Ontario — equals no future for the young people of this province. We have taken on those issues. We have taken them on. We've asked the tough questions. We're listening for the right answers. We're putting that system together piece by piece for our students, for their future. That's the reason my colleagues and I are working so hard to make the improvements as quickly as we possibly can.

HOSPITAL FINANCING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): A question for the Premier: For two years now we've been telling you that your cuts to hospital funding are damaging patient care across this province. You want to ignore that. You want to ignore the fact that you've cut over $600 million from hospital budgets. You insist on moving ahead, bulldozing people, shoving your cuts and changes down people's throats in community after community.

Today there were two studies released that you ought to have a look at: One is done by the University of Western Ontario school of business that examines what's happening with hospitals; the other is done by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce looking at hospital budgets. They both conclude that your cuts to hospitals and hospital budgets are damaging patient care all across this province. They lead to this question: Will you acknowledge now what everybody else knows, that you are damaging patient care? Will your government stop the cuts to hospitals?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): As you know, the context in which you're asking the question is that you are talking to a government that has increased health care funding to its highest level in the history of Ontario. Secondly, you are talking to a government that is carrying forward with the restructuring proposals that your Premier and your minister and your government started.

We have had some who have expressed concerns with the speed and the pace of those changes. As you will know, many hospitals have said, "Yes, the reductions you made in the first two years were quite appropriate and needed to be made, and so did the restructuring." However, at the same time they said, "Unless the restructuring gets along quicker — and thank God your government's there; the other two sat on it for 10 years — we don't believe there are any other savings in those budgets to reinvest in other areas." We concurred, we agreed, and we announced that any further reductions are on hold until we get the restructuring proposals up and running.

1410

Mr Hampton: Premier, you should have a look at this report by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. It

looks at the budgets of 192 hospitals across the province, and it shows that many of them are in big trouble. It says you cannot cut hospital budgets and at the same time demand that they restructure the system. You can't do it.

Premier, the people you cite, for example, the Ontario Hospital Association, call upon you — they released these reports — to make a commitment today that there will be no further cuts to hospital budgets during the term of your government. Will you make that commitment today?

Hon Mr Harris: What they specifically asked for was that there be no cuts to hospital budgets until the restructuring is there, until we fund the restructuring, until the capital reinvestments are made, until the community reinvestments are made. We have made that commitment. We have made it to them. The Minister of Finance has made that commitment and I'm happy to give you that commitment today.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): In fact, the Premier is mistaken. What the Minister of Finance has said is that they will not be cut in the 1998-99 fiscal year. That does not talk about the restructuring and the time frames according to these reports.

You've been given independent advice. This report from the Ivey business school says "less nursing time per patient, reduced patient supervision, slow recording of patient data, high employee stress, reduced level of cleanliness in facilities."

The real condemnation in these reports is that they set out clearly the problem with your agenda. We've been telling you all along that you cannot cut hospital funding and expect them to restructure at the same time. But you had to bull it through. Hospitals can't maintain patient care, drop budgets by over 7% and change all their clinical practices all at the same time. Taking care of sick people costs money, and restructuring costs money. You're destroying the ability of hospitals to do either one.

The question —

The Speaker: Thank you, member for London Centre. Premier?

Hon Mr Harris: We agree with the reports. The Ministry of Health sponsored the press conference today. Let me read to you from the Toronto Hospital, "We believe the revenue reduction targets for the first two of the three-year cycle were stringent but appropriate. The increased efficiencies were long overdue and we believe the targets were correct. We understand the policy regarding the third year has changed and essentially the hospital industry as a whole will be flatlined. The Toronto Hospital applauds that decision."

We have given an unqualified commitment. We've committed $2 billion in new money to hospitals to assist with the restructuring. We've committed new capital dollars to assist with the restructuring. We have committed as well that there will be no reductions to hospital budgets until the restructuring takes place and those supports are in the community. In the meantime we are funding those restructurings. So we've made all those commitments. They are still there, and the hospitals continue to tell us that is appropriate.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question to the Minister of Labour, but I would say it's obvious the Premier still isn't listening. Minister of Labour, you have made some incredible changes to the way quasi-judicial appointments are made to bodies like the Ontario Labour Relations Board and the Workers' Compensation Board. You have made the process totally partisan. You have tried to ignore the fact that you've done this.

Last night, Mr Ron Ellis, the very respected founding chair of the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal, made a very important speech to the Canadian Bar Association. Mr Ellis said the Harris government's policy on appointments to that tribunal and to the Ontario Labour Relations Board "is fundamentally different from anything that has been seen before in Ontario, and it is a policy that, in my respectful opinion, is incompatible with the judicial integrity" of the administration of justice.

What are you going to do to restore judicial integrity to the —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Minister.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): Perhaps I should also quote from what was said last night in the speech by Mr Ellis. He is referring here to the NDP, and he indicated:

"The ours-for-theirs strategy first really came to life in Ontario with the election of the NDP government. As far as I recall, with the NDP the focus of the strategy was principally on agency chairs. And it was under the NDP that the strategy made its first appearance in the labour field. I refer here to the mid-term change of the labour relations board chair that occurred shortly after the NDP formed the government."

Let me say to the leader of the third party that our government will continue to ensure that the independence, the impartiality and the integrity of the board is protected.

Mr Hampton: Let me say that I am impressed by how selectively the minister can quote from a speech. Let me quote the very next sentences that come in this speech. He says:

"I am not personally aware of any instance of incumbent non-chair adjudicators being dismissed or refused an expected reappointment to make way for the NDP government's appointments. And, with a few...exceptions in the filling of vacancies, the NDP government by and large continued" to follow a "competitive selection policy for adjudicators, including...the active involvement of agency chairs."

Minister, what Mr Ellis says is that for the first time in Ontario, we have a government that is inflicting partisan politics into the appointment of quasi-judicial officers.

The Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Hampton: He called on all lawyers across the province to become active in demanding a system which

will allow for the survival of a credible administrative justice system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Perhaps the member of the third party didn't read the quote, but I won't repeat it. I will simply indicate that he does stress the fact that this issue came to life in Ontario with the election of the NDP government. I want to stress again that our government is going to ensure that the impartiality, the independence and the integrity of the board is protected.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): The Ontario Labour Relations Board is about to accept awesome new responsibilities as a result of your restructuring under Bill 136. You know that you had to give those powers over to the labour relations board when it was seen that your proposed commission was going to be stacked and packed with Tory hacks, and that was unacceptable to the credibility of the process of labour relations in this province.

We have heard in committee hearings today, as short and as strange as they are, that two things are needed for the board: first, increased funding, and second, to restore the integrity of the appointments to the labour relations board before they're given these new responsibilities.

With regard to Bill 136, what exactly are you going to say today to restore the confidence in the new appointments you're going to have to make as a result of the increased responsibilities the labour board is about to take on under Bill 136?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I simply say that I understand the public hearings on Bill 136 have been going extremely well; in fact, I see some very supportive quotes.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members for Cochrane South and Hamilton Centre, come to order.

Hon Mrs Witmer: The police association indicates:

"We have had extensive meetings. We appreciate the time and energy. We believe the sessions have provided a forum to address our issues in a meaningful and productive fashion. We have gained a better understanding of the government's issues and believe that they, in turn, have gained better insight into the mechanics of our system."

OSSTF says they welcome and applaud the moves that have been made. OPSEU says, "We welcome the amendments being proposed to Bill 136."

The Speaker: Answer, please.

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's obvious that people have recognized that this government, in order to achieve its objectives, is quite prepared to be flexible and —

The Speaker: Thank you.

1420

HOSPITAL FINANCING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I'd like to address a question to the Premier. I'd like to bring you back to the report from the Ivey school of business and one from the CIBC about your Harris hospital system.

Your earlier answers indicate that you don't understand the gravity of what they said today. Every measure you've taken with hospitals has created significant problems. It has put nurses and doctors in a state of stress. It has taken away from hospitals the very people they need to be able to manage change properly.

The CIBC says you took away $604 million, and you can't deny that. With that $604 million, you took away a lot of care.

Today may be one of the last chances you're going to get to be reasonable, in the sense that the association is willing to talk to you. There still is a sense that the crisis out there in Ontario hospitals can be averted.

Will you do two things: Will you promise to put off the funding cuts until beyond the year 2000, to cancel them entirely, and will you put money back in the system to take care of the problems presented today?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I'll put it off as long as it takes to make sure that the $2 billion we're flowing, the capital dollars we're flowing, the community supports we're flowing, are all in place. If it takes five years, fine; if it takes two years, fine; if it takes three years, fine.

Second, yes, we do commit to make sure that those reinvestments are in place and that the timing is right and to work with the Ontario Hospital Association, as it has asked us to do. I don't know why you have trouble taking yes for an answer.

Mr Kennedy: The reason is because yes in this House has not meant yes in the hospitals. Last year you tried to give them $21 million less than was promised in the public allocations. Last year, your minister said he would give $120 million more to home care that would allow them to accept some of those patients who are being kicked out of hospital quicker and sicker. Instead, he spent $124 million less, $4 million less than the year before. On community mental health you said you would spend $25 million more, and you spent $1 million less.

That's your record, Premier. You need to do better. You need to give patients, hospitals, nurses and doctors an assurance, a guarantee that there will be no cuts to hospitals in your mandate and that if they need it, they can get more money to make up for the money you've taken away, and replace some of the services, like in Windsor today, which occasioned the resignation of emergency doctors, frustrated with you, Mr Harris, and your inability to make the hospital system one of excellence. They said that today. They said: "This hospital system no longer has excellence. It's barely satisfactory."

Premier, will you do this today?

Hon Mr Harris: Yes, we absolutely guarantee that there will be no cuts to health care funding. In fact, we'll continue our policy of increasing health care funding. We also commit to two billion in restructuring dollars to assist with that: $2 billion in hospital and health care restructuring, over that process.

I would give you some quotes, since you are happy with quotes. MacKinnon, the OHA: "strong supporters of progressive and constructive change...not only support the

change, but we create change...increased strain on health care delivery services not a new phenomenon but a pattern that has been with us for many years. Liberal and NDP...cut 11,000 beds while hospital visits rose by 300,000." The Ivey report: "The Ivey report is not a study on patient care outcomes."

What we are getting is a report on how we can go from the disaster you left us to quality, first-class, modern health care in Ontario in the 21st century.

FRANCHISE BUSINESSES

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): A question to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations: The member for Sault Ste Marie has been urging you for the past year to take action on the regulations to protect small business owners who are involved in franchise operations. You continue to say you're going to do something, but you never do.

I have been reading the latest issue of Franchise Times. It's an American publication. It says something interesting about Ontario in the current issue:

"Large franchise corporations shouldn't worry about new regulations in Ontario to protect small business franchisees. There has been a change in government in Ontario, along with a change in the minister in charge of the franchise industry. I think it is becoming more and more dubious as to when, or if ever, this sort of regulation will ever be introduced."

Minister, it's pretty clear that the large franchise corporations understand that you're not going to do anything to protect small business. What's your response? Are you going to do something or not?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): Yes, we're doing something.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Supplementary.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): That response is typical of the responses I've been getting over the last two years.

Tomorrow this minister is expected to make an appearance at the huge franchise show here in Toronto. This will be a great occasion for him to change his mind and tell the big franchise operators that Ontario is no longer going to be a happy hunting ground for them.

Terry and Les Stewart from Nutrilawn were in the House last week. They laid a complaint before the franchise association, on your suggestion that the franchise industry should regulate itself. Three days later, they had their loan called by Nutrilawn.

New Canadians and immigrant families are one group of entrepreneurs particularly affected by this. Tomorrow, you meet with the franchisors. Will you tell them that you're going to regulate?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: The member knows full well that we have a meeting on a regular basis with both parts of this sector, the franchisors and franchisees. This is an attempt for the first time to bring some balanced legislation to this province. I could remind the member that when you were in government this did come up before. This is not a new item for you to deal with. In fact, your government indicated a certain amount of interest in doing something, and you know what? It did nothing.

We are now coming forward with something balanced. It's very important for us to come forward with something that's going to be balanced, certainly something that requires disclosure requirements, a piece of legislation that has a code of ethics, has a right to associate. All these various things that have been coming up as concerns from franchisees we will be addressing.

We feel it's very important to us. We are reacting to the interests of the small franchisees because we are cognizant that there are a lot of people involved with this, small business people, who we have a concern for. So the answer is yes.

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: When the leader of the third party was addressing his question to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, he made reference to having read the particular franchise journal that he spoke of. I heard from the area of the member for Quinte the interjection, "Was it in Braille?" I don't know for sure what that was supposed to mean, but it seems to be beyond merely even insensitive in the context of understanding what it means to be blind and to require to read by way of Braille. I'm asking if that remark "Was it in Braille?" in response to the leader of the third party —

The Speaker: The member for Welland-Thorold, let me just say quickly I did not hear it. I will go to the member for Quinte. If he said it, he may withdraw it or choose to do whatever he chooses to do. Member for Quinte.

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): I withdraw it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): My question is for the Minister of Education. I was under the impression that the Minister of Education announced last Friday that, in response to the demands of the various teachers' unions, the Education Quality Improvement Act would not infringe upon the rights of teachers to bargain collectively or strike. On Monday the Leader of the Opposition claimed that this was not the case. He claimed that the Education Quality Improvement Act somehow secretly allowed cabinet to strip the teachers of Ontario of their right to strike.

I ask the minister, does Bill 160 take away the right to strike, could it ever and does the minister intend to?

1430

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I want to thank my friend and colleague the member for Mississauga South for the question because I believe this may have been an attempt to boil the water a little higher, to turn the temperature up on the part of the Leader of the Opposition, which I think is unfortunate.

I made an announcement before the introduction of the bill that said that in the consultations we'd had with

teachers' unions — and I had them one on one following review of Bill 100 — we'd heard their principal issues: making sure they had the right to represent teachers, making sure the principals remained part of the bargaining unit and the importance they placed around the right to strike. We made that announcement before we put the bill in the House.

The Leader of the Opposition made reference a few days ago to a section of the act that he said would impinge on the right to strike. We have outside counsel now that has given us a report that says the enabling legislation would not extend to permit the provincial cabinet to enact legislation relating to labour relations matters. It's very clear, and I regret the fact the Leader of the Opposition, who's a lawyer, didn't get this kind of information before he turned the temperature up in the circumstances in Ontario.

Mrs Marland: This clause that the Leader of the Opposition has interpreted rather strangely is part of the package of reforms that is before the House. What is its purpose?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I regret the Leader of the Opposition didn't investigate this matter a little further, because he would have found that the purpose of this section in the bill was actually to protect students during the transition period, particularly the rights of francophone and anglophone students who may have their schools switched during the course of this transition. This part of the bill makes sure they have the educational services they need, want and deserve. That's why it's there: to protect the children of the province.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Minister of Finance and it has to do with the property tax bill. He will know there is growing concern in the business community about the impact of the property tax bill, that the details are coming very late. We're dealing this afternoon with part of it. But the business community certainly is worried. We are only three months away from the new tax year.

They've watched with interest — I guess that's one way to describe it — the removal of portions of education from the residential property tax, but they were surprised to find they still will be paying, I gather, exactly the same amount for education on their property tax, plus now picking up social housing.

They heard the promise from the Premier that residential property taxes should drop over the next couple of years by 5% to 10%. Earlier this week, the government announced that it would be freezing the revenue from residential property tax and imposing a uniform mill rate on residential properties. The question is, is the government planning the same policy with our commercial-industrial property tax sector?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): The honourable member will know, because he has already alluded to it, that we are debating Bill 149 in the House this afternoon. I will be tabling some seven amendments and many proposed regulations to the legislation, many of which speak to some of the issues you're talking about. I'd be happy to discuss them with you further after they are tabled later today.

I can tell you that, as the member knows, we had a C&I panel of experts from many fields that advised the government on how we should treat commercial and industrial property, and I can assure you their suggestions and recommendations will be taken into account when the final decisions are made.

Mr Phillips: I appreciate that, but our business community, which is trying to plan ahead, would like a little more than just three months' notice on one of their major expenses.

I go back to the question I just raised with you. Surely if the government has made a decision on this — you've said to the residential property taxpayers that you will have a uniform mill rate across the province — the business community is owed an answer on this. Also, in response you can give us your answer on whether we will have a uniform mill rate.

Secondly, they've asked me to get an explanation of the policy logic of removing education costs from the residential portion but leaving 100% of the current education costs on the business community. What was the policy reason for making that decision?

Hon Mr Eves: The response to that is quite simple. The municipalities wanted more tax room. They came back to us with a Who Does What proposal. We accepted their proposal. I don't think that changes the tax burden on commercial properties. As a matter of fact, there are several measures in Bill 106 and Bill 149 that go to treating smaller commercial properties much more equitably than they have ever been treated in the past.

As the member knows, municipalities will now have the ability to have up to three different commercial rates for smaller commercial properties, taking into account small, medium and large-size commercial properties. We on this side of the House don't happen to think that small commercial properties should be taxed as heavily as larger commercial properties are. If the honourable member disagrees, he should say so.

I understand the need for businesses of all types, be they commercial or industrial, to know what their tax base is, and I can assure you they will have those answers as soon as we can provide them. Some of them will be provided this very afternoon.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): To the Minister of Community and Social Services: The minister knows full well that a terrible tragedy occurred in Toronto earlier this week when two innocent people were murdered and a third took his own life. You see, we've received information that George Holdbrook was in receipt of GWA assistance under the category "permanent ill health, disabled," that his August cheque was held back

after he failed to attend at an appointment in July to apply for referral to family benefits, and that one of his major concerns was that he receive a drug card. That meant he had been for two months without medication.

Minister, we agree with your change to the system that no longer puts it on the shoulders of family doctors to determine eligibility. However, this isn't the first tragedy that has occurred because of your drive to force people from social assistance. We are afraid it also won't be the last.

Will you please request an inquiry into the manner in which the case of Holdbrook was handled so that we can determine what, if anything, went wrong and avoid a tragedy like this in the future.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): First of all, it was certainly a very sad event that occurred when three people lost their lives earlier this week. I know that all of us would feel sympathy and extend condolences to the families that were involved in that tragedy. But I would also like to caution the honourable member that the police are investigating this. There are yet to be facts that will be determined.

I also say to the honourable member that there has been no change in disability regulations; there has been no change in disability policies in this province. They are the same as they were under his government and they are the same as they were under the previous government. I would caution the honourable member about making any deductions or comments about a situation that is yet to be determined.

Mr Kormos: Minister, we know that you take great pride in the fact that some 200,000 people have been forced off the assistance rolls; you've lost 30% of them and you don't know where they've gone to because you haven't been able to identify them after they've been forced off social assistance.

You brought in Andersen Consulting to aid you by withholding cheques from people who haven't provided the technical monthly income verification. We're told that staff shortages in a number of welfare offices mean that some people are having their cheques withheld simply because the data entry is not happening on time. We also know that 60- to 65-year-olds with your new bill are going to be forced off family benefits on to workfare and reduced incomes.

Your system is becoming increasingly punitive, increasingly inflexible. We're concerned that this will continue to generate levels of hostility and despair and frustration among recipients such that case workers and other members of the public may become the victims of that hostility and frustration. Please, will you not conduct an examination into the need for some flexibility —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you very much. Minister?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I find myself quite at a loss that the member would actually be asking a minister of the crown to interfere in a police investigation. I would caution the honourable member that the police are investigating a tragic circumstance.

I would also like to point out to the honourable member that 218,000 fewer people are trapped in welfare. We know that those people have left welfare because they've gone out into paid jobs, and we know that because no government ever bothered to ask the question about where people went. We went out last year and did an independent survey and we found in that independent survey that 62% left for employment-related reasons; that an additional 11% left because they had income increases, which meant they didn't need to have welfare; and that other people listed reasons such as that they went to jail or they found it too much of a hassle to get a government cheque, which would cause you to question their need in the first place. We asked the survey, sir. They had never done that.

1440

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): My question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services and concerns the federal government's throne speech of a couple of days ago. I find it quite astounding that the federal throne speech did not address the very important concern that I think almost every Canadian has: the Young Offenders Act. The vast majority of people in my riding of Durham East agree with you, Minister, that the Young Offenders Act is just not doing the job it was designed to do. They want the federal government to listen to the people and get on with fixing the federal Young Offenders Act. What has our government done to put the issue of the Young Offenders Act on the front burner of the federal government's agenda?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services): I very much appreciate the question. With respect to law-and-order issues, the Liberal throne speech was a significant disappointment, not just for this government but for other governments across Canada which expected some commitment to significant movement with respect to the Young Offenders Act.

Where was the commitment to automatic transfer of young offenders charged with serious offences to adult court? Where was the promise to publicize the names of serious violent offenders? Where was any reference to toughening up a failed act?

The federal government recently received a report indicating strong weaknesses in the system right across this country, and concerns of police officers. One of the quotes in that report was, "Kids learn early on: Even if you do it, you don't have to face up to it." The government of Canada has that report in their hands. They have listened to testimony from various provincial governments and individual citizens across this country and they have failed to act. It is a significant disappointment, and we intend to keep up the pressure.

Mr O'Toole: I publicly want to thank our Solicitor General for his undaunted commitment to the correctional system as well as to victims services. Thank you, Minister.

When you read the throne speech, it talks about developing alternatives to incarceration and trumpets the decrease in certain crime rates and all these fine, idealistic concepts, but nowhere does it mention the reality that the rate of certain serious violent crimes among young offenders is actually on the rise.

The fact is that these violent young offenders need to be dealt with in the correctional system, and despite all the platitudes in the world, that costs money. Nowhere does the federal government make any commitment to put resources into dealing with reality. Minister, tell us today: Is Ontario going to get its fair share of the federal funding for young offenders' institutions?

Hon Mr Runciman: We inherited a system from the Liberal and NDP governments that was failing the people of this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Minister.

Hon Mr Runciman: To Liberals and NDPers in the province, the fact —

Interjections.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): What was the question again?

The Speaker: Do you want to ask it again?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mr Runciman: To Liberals and NDPers in this province it's a joke that over 60% of young offenders will repeat and over 80% of our adult population were graduates of their youth justice system. That was a joke, Mr Speaker.

We've set out to correct that system. We've set out to address the concerns of victims in this province. We've set out to address the concerns of ordinary citizens about youth crime and increasing levels of violent crime in this province and in this country. What kind of reaction are we getting from the federal Liberal government? I want to tell you —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mr Runciman: What kind of response are we getting from the federal Liberal government? A reduction in their cost-sharing from 50% to 30% and a further reduction coming up. What are they saying to us? More diversion, more coddling of people who are committing violent crimes in this country and in this province. We believe in a range of alternative programs, but certainly people who do the crime have to do the time. Canadians are fed up with soft, coddling treatment of young offenders and want to see measures that actually work, reduce crime and turn around young people from a life of crime.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, last year I told you about my community's outrage when a motorist ran a red light at St Clair and Dufferin, seriously injuring nine people and killing one. The driver got away with a mere $300 fine for running that light and, at that time, you didn't do anything about it when we asked.

Once again, there are calls to make high-collision intersections safer by installing red-light cameras at these killer intersections. Metropolitan Toronto Police Chief Boothby wants these red-light cameras because he doesn't have enough police officers to babysit all these intersections. Furthermore, yesterday Metro council passed a resolution to have these cameras installed.

The problem is that you and your government won't cooperate. Minister, what will do to make safer these intersections that are killing people across this province?

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): I want to answer my colleague from across the way in a manner I feel is appropriate obviously. We want to target the drivers, not the vehicles, and we want to make sure that the ones who are breaking the law are going to be punished. I believe that the road safety plan we have put together is certainly working towards that element.

There's still a lot more to do, and I understand that, but what we also need are more enforcement officers out there because that's where I feel we're going to get a lot more of the targeting as far as who is breaking the law. Photoradar or red-light cameras, all it is is a cash grab. We're not stopping people from doing it over and over again.

One other thing I want to say to the member as well: I believe that if enforcement officers are there to stop these people who are breaking the law, maybe there are some other things that are going to evolve from that stop. I really feel that red-light cameras are not going to solve the problem.

1450

Mr Colle: As you know, Mr Minister, you're more than willing to use photo cameras on the 407 to grab cash from people when they use the highway. What people are asking is to try this as a pilot project because police forces across this province have been cut. In Metro they're a thousand police officers short. They don't have the officers to babysit the intersections.

In Metro alone there are 11,000 collisions at these intersections a year; 50,000 across the province. People are running red lights on a daily basis without any regard. This person who killed the person at St Clair and Dufferin got a measly $300 fine, went back to California, and left that person dead and the other nine injured. What kind of deterrent is that? There are no cameras, there are no fines. What can we do? What will you do?

Hon Mr Palladini: I think the honourable member is putting too much emphasis on a camera. It is inconclusive. Although it might have some merit in certain places, it is inconclusive.

I want to say again that this government wants to do the right thing, wants to have more enforcement officers out there who will enforce the law. People are going to be face to face with an enforcement officer, rather than having a camera take a picture and not targeting the culprit. We want to target the driver, not the vehicle.

As far as the honourable member making a reference to the 407 is concerned, I'm really surprised that he would

say that, because we're talking about a different element altogether.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): I have a question to the Premier. You may have heard me earlier today raise the issue of members of the transition team refusing to come to the standing committee on general government this afternoon to answer questions that we have to put to them. I want to remind you that these are people you have appointed through order in council to, in effect, put together the transition to the new megacity. They're people who had agreed last week to come for about half an hour. We had slotted them in for an hour. They're people who I presume haven't appreciated the fact that what they're doing is refusing to come on a decision that was made not just by me but by the committee as a whole. In fact this morning we voted, with the support of some of your members, to ask them again to come this afternoon.

What I'd like to ask you, Premier, is, will you undertake between now and the beginning of committee this afternoon — I realize time is short — to phone Mr Tonks, the head of the transition team, or have someone from your office call him, and impress upon him the importance of respecting the committee's decision and have him or one of the members of the transition team appear before the committee this afternoon?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): No, I won't interfere with a committee of the Legislature of Ontario. They can order their own business. They can direct what they wish. I think you would find it very improper if I or my office or the cabinet or the minister started to direct the committee.

I understand there were concerns that when the transition team did come before the committee there was an unfortunate demonstration by those who thought screaming and yelling and interfering was more important than getting the facts. I've always said I don't think that tactic works very well. I think reasonable dialogue and discussion is better. If you wish me to provide the transcript of your question to the Chair of the committee, I'd be glad to do so.

Mr Silipo: No, Premier. The issue here is twofold. First of all, you should understand, and perhaps you haven't, that the committee, by a majority which included members of your own caucus, this morning, when we heard they were not coming, voted to request them again to attend this afternoon. We're not talking here about any witnesses. We're talking about people who were appointed through orders in council, people who have been given a task that's directly related to the work of the committee in dealing with Bill 148.

Premier, I'm asking you, because it seems to me it's the only way. The committee made its decision. The committee made the request. Mr Tonks and the members of the transition team are ignoring the committee's decision. So I'm asking you to step in and ensure that Mr Tonks respects the processes of the Legislature and understands that he has an obligation to attend the committee, either in person or through one of the other members of the transition team.

Hon Mr Harris: As you know, the transition commission did make a presentation. All parties had an opportunity to ask questions. If you would still like to ask legitimate questions instead of your grandstanding silly old demonstrations, you're welcome to do that directly to the transition commission. Perhaps you will actually get more productive answers that way. But I'm not about to interfere in the process of the committee or to demand or insist that people do things.

HOME CARE

Mrs Lillian Ross (Hamilton West): My question is addressed to the minister responsible for seniors. Yesterday in the House two members of the opposition raised concerns about the deficit being run up by the Hamilton-Wentworth home care program. Many of these services will soon be provided by a community care access centre which I know will be opening very shortly. I wonder if the minister would provide for the benefit of the members of this House an update on the CCAC in Hamilton and how that will improve the situation.

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question, as well as the member for Wentworth East, who asked the same question back on August 26 on behalf of the situation in Hamilton.

I've had an opportunity to look at the letter being referenced yesterday by the leader of the third party. The information he failed to share with the House was "the disturbing news that the home care program must stay within its allocated budget from now on" — the disturbing news that the home care program has to stay within its budget.

Some of the highest per capita costs for home care exist in the city of Hamilton, Ontario. The communities of both the member for London Centre and the member for Rainy River are spending less on a per capita basis and yet providing a very efficient service. We're simply saying to the programs in Hamilton that they must maintain the level of efficiency that exists elsewhere in this province. Quite frankly, the Hamilton-Wentworth situation was $2 million over budget when the NDP were in government, and they did nothing about it.

TEAM CANADA 1972

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm rising to seek unanimous consent to allow the member for Scarborough West to now move a motion with respect to Team Canada 1972 and that immediately upon motion the Speaker shall put the question without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): I move, seconded by Mr Bradley, the member for St Catharines, and Mr Wildman, the member for Algoma, that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario indicate its strong support for the induction of Team Canada 1972 into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

PETITIONS

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 53 people that reads as follows:

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass bills empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): Dangerous, high-collision intersections:

"Whereas there are a number of dangerous, high-collision intersections throughout Metropolitan Toronto and Ontario;

"Whereas a pilot project installing photo-radar-type cameras would help monitor these dangerous intersections and act as a deterrent;

"Whereas photo-radar camera monitoring systems have worked well in Australia and other jurisdictions, improving safety;

"Whereas the provincial government is using a photo-radar-type camera on the new 407 to collect tolls;

"Whereas the increase in traffic and growing disregard for speed limits and traffic laws is the cause of great concern to pedestrians, cyclists and safe motorists alike;

"Whereas funding for extra policing is not available and very limited considering the great number of demands on the police,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial Solicitor General support the installation of photo-radar-type cameras as a pilot project at Metropolitan Toronto's 10 most dangerous intersections and at various other dangerous intersections throughout the province."

I'll affix my name to this petition.

1500

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition regarding the Plastimet fire in Hamilton and the need for a public inquiry.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

Where are the other Hamilton Tories on this issue?

NON-PROFIT HOUSING

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): "Whereas we are the residents of Ontario who currently live in supportive non-profit housing, we petition the provincial government not to transfer the financial responsibilities for supportive non-profit housing to our municipality.

"We, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly to consider and acknowledge the difference between non-profit housing and supportive non-profit housing. Options Bytown is supportive non-profit housing. We petition that funding for our home and our support continue."

I sign my name to this petition as well.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Only 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Women's College is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to teaching, research and care dedicated to women;

"The World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as its first collaborating centre for women's health in both North and South America;

"Without a self-governing Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and the world will lose a health resource that is not duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the comprehensive model of women's health pioneered by Women's College Hospital through ensuring self-governance of the one hospital in Ontario dedicated to women's health."

This is signed by over 300 residents of Toronto and I am proud to affix my signature.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): The four million library users in this province are very unhappy with Bill 109. We have a petition that's sent to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario re library services and Bill 109, the Local Control of Public Libraries Act. The petition reads:

"The system of public libraries in this province has successfully and equitably met the needs of Ontarians for nearly a century and a half. This has been done through the effective use of independent citizen boards that have been relying on adequate provincial and local funding. Bill 109 and other initiatives of the present provincial government will irrevocably undo this system."

This petition calls on the government to withdraw Bill 109 and to:

"(1) provide for the continued existence of truly independent citizen library boards;

"(2) restore adequate provincial and local funding;

"(3) abolish and forbid user fees; and

"(4) ensure universal and equitable access to library resources and services."

I'm proud to add my name to this petition.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas workers' health and safety must be protected in the province of Ontario, especially the right to refuse work which is likely to endanger a worker, the right to know about workplace hazards and the right to participate in joint health and safety committees; and

"Whereas the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations help protect workers' health and safety and workers' rights in this area; and

"Whereas the government's discussion paper Review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act threatens workers' health and safety by proposing to deregulate the existing act and regulations to reduce or eliminate workers' health and safety rights and to reduce enforcement of health and safety laws by the Ministry of Labour; and

"Whereas workers must have a full opportunity to be heard about the proposed drastic erosion in their present protections from injuries and occupational diseases;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose any attempt to erode the present provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations. Further we, the undersigned, demand that public hearings on the discussion paper be held in at least 20 communities throughout Ontario."

I proudly add my name to theirs.

FIRE SAFETY

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I'd like to present a petition to this Legislature. It's entitled, "Don't Get Burned by Bill 84," and is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Firefighters need speed, experience and teamwork to save lives. The undersigned oppose any legislation that could undermine the work of local firefighters and jeopardize fire safety in my community. Please listen to professional firefighters and amend Bill 84 to eliminate the threat to fire safety."

The petition is signed by 25 residents, and I add my signature to theirs.

BLOOD SYSTEM

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"That over 70% of persons with haemophilia were infected with hepatitis C through the use of blood-derived treatment products. With hepatitis C as with HIV, the same institutional players of the blood system failed to respond to the identified risk of transmission, failed to properly notify people of the potential risk of exposure, failed to implement safety measures to lessen the risk of transmission, that is, the failure of the Red Cross to implement surrogate testing for hepatitis C for over four years, and now continue to deny any responsibility for these failures.

"That the representatives of Hemophilia Ontario and its hepatitis C task force have been advocating for financial compensation to those individuals who have been infected with hepatitis C through the Canadian blood system. The provincial Minister of Health, Jim Wilson, has three times cancelled meetings with Hemophilia Ontario, and the provincial and territorial ministers of health have publicly stated that they intend to keep the issue of hepatitis C compensation off their agenda in future meetings; and

"Further, that the only prescribed treatment for hepatitis C in Ontario is alpha interferon, which has a less than 25% success rate on clearing the virus among people who have had one exposure to the virus. Many haemophiliacs were repeatedly exposed to the hepatitis C virus through the use of blood-derived treatment products," and, to quote from Blood magazine, volume 87, number 5, March 1996, "The response to interferon therapy in haemophiliacs with chronic HCV infection is poor and appears inferior to that of other groups of infected patients. In view of the generally poor response to interferon therapy in haemophiliacs, treatment with interferon is inappropriate in the majority of individuals...

"Therefore, your petitioners call upon the Minister of Health to meet with representatives of Hemophilia Ontario's hepatitis C task force now to discuss issues related to compensation."

I am proud to affix my signature.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas communities strongly disagree with allowing women to go topless in public;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To enact legislation to require women to wear tops in public places for protection of our children and for public safety in general."

This has been signed by 54 of my constituents, and I'll sign it to put it in the record.

CREMATORIUM IN VAUGHAN

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I have a further petition here, signed by over 100 residents with respect to a crematorium in the Jane and Steeles area:

"Whereas an application has been submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Energy for a certificate of approval for the development of a crematorium and columbaria at the northeast corner of Jane Street and Steeles Avenue in the city of Vaughan....

"Now, therefore, we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"We call upon the Ministry of Environment and Energy, which has the primary responsibility for protecting and enhancing a healthful environment for the present and future wellbeing of the people of Ontario, to:

"(1) recognize that we, the citizens most adversely affected by this proposal, have the right to participate in government decision-making;

"(2) honour its commitment to safeguard our environment and therefore reject this proposal for a crematorium of such a large scale and literally at our doorstep;

"(3) acknowledge that the health of thousands of residents will be at risk and thereby refuse to grant approval for this project."

I do concur and I will affix my signature to it.

PAY EQUITY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Harris government has introduced Bill 136; and

"Whereas Bill 136 strips entitlements to employee status and therefore pay equity rights for home child care providers; and

"Whereas home child care providers are predominantly female; and

"Whereas home child care providers are one of the lowest-paid groups of workers in Ontario;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 136 and its implications for the Pay Equity Act."

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I proudly add my name to theirs.

1510

TVONTARIO

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): As you know, TVOntario is threatened by privatization under this government's review announced recently. There's a massive petition campaign going on across the province, and I have a petition sent to me by V.C. Smith from Lakehead University. The petition reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas TVOntario/TFO is owned by the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has opposed public support for maintaining TVO as a publicly owned and funded educational broadcaster by putting TVO through a privatization review; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has not confirmed that full public participation will be part of this privatization review;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to hold open and honest public consultation with the people of Ontario before making a decision on the future of TVO/TFO."

I'm proud to sign my name to this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): A further petition regarding the need for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton:

"We, the undersigned, request the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy and Environment Canada jointly:

"To conduct a full-scale public inquiry into the Hamilton Plastimet fire to determine the complete nature and extent of the pollution it has caused, the health effects on firefighters and others attending the fire, as well as the residents in Hamilton and further afield;

"To ensure safe, speedy and complete cleanup of the fire site, plus residential and all other areas where chemicals from the fire have fallen out."

I add my name to these petitioners.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): Mine's about red-light cameras trying to make high-collision intersections safer.

"To the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 55,000 motor vehicle collisions at intersections throughout Ontario every year;

"Whereas running red lights is becoming too routine at many high-collision intersections;

"Whereas there is a shortage of police officers;

"Whereas the collisions at these intersections are resulting in serious injury to pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

"Whereas installation of red-light cameras at dangerous intersections has proven to be successful in Australia and other countries;

"Whereas the provincial government has endorsed the use of similar camera systems to collect tolls on the new 407 freeway;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial Solicitor General and Minister of Transportation support a pilot project for the installation of red-light cameras at high-collision intersections to monitor and prosecute motorists who run red lights."

I'll affix my name to this petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women and only 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health; and

"Whereas women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's; and

"Whereas Women's College is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to research and treatment dedicated to women's health needs; and

"Whereas the World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as the sole collaborating centre for women's health for both North and South America; and

"Whereas without Women's College Hospital the women of Ontario and of the world will lose a health resource that will not be duplicated elsewhere;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the continuance, independence, women-centred focus and accessible downtown location of the one hospital most crucial to the future of women's health."

I proudly add my name to theirs.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR MUNICIPAL FINANCE ACT, 1997
(No. 2)

LOI DE 1997 SUR LE FINANCEMENT ÉQUITABLE DES MUNICIPALITÉS (N^{O} 2)

Mr Eves moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 149, An Act to continue the reforms begun by the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997 and to make other amendments respecting the financing of local governments / Projet de loi 149, Loi continuant les réformes amorcées par la Loi de 1997 sur le financement équitable des municipalités et apportant d'autres modifications relativement au financement des administrations locales.

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): Before I begin, I would like to indicate that I'll be sharing my time today with the member for Simcoe Centre and the member for Peterborough.

Ontarians know that the property tax system in Ontario needs updating. They know it has become outdated, inconsistent and unfair. They told us to fix these problems, and we are fixing them.

We began to fix these problems by establishing the Ontario fair assessment system, which bases the assessment of properties in Ontario on fair current values and updates those values on a regular basis. We began to fix them by eliminating the outdated business occupancy tax. We began to fix them by giving municipalities more autonomy and flexibility to implement the new property tax system to suit local needs and priorities and by putting in place measures to protect low-income seniors and disabled people.

Building on the foundation established in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, this bill is another step towards our goal of making the tax system fairer for all Ontario taxpayers.

Small business is the engine that drives the Canadian economy. In the Fair Municipal Finance Act we eliminated the antiquated business occupancy tax and provided municipalities with considerable flexibility to recover those revenues in a way that satisfies their community needs.

Business groups, including the Ottawa-Carleton Board of Trade, the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, the Windsor and District Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Toronto have all responded favourably to the measures taken in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, measures that will result in both tax fairness and economic growth.

In this bill, we are giving municipalities the opportunity to further assist small businesses by establishing lower tax rates for lower-valued commercial properties, such as small retail strip stores and restaurants.

Bill 149 also enhances the property tax protection provided for low-income seniors and the disabled in Bill 106 by extending the deferral and cancellation provisions to include the school portion of property taxes.

Bill 149 introduces specific measures that respond to feedback from municipalities, non-profit organizations, small businesses and others in a way that is fair, clear, consistent and accountable. We are listening to the advice that these groups are providing to us. We will continue to listen.

That is why, to encourage dialogue on these important issues, I am today releasing seven proposed amendments and seven proposed regulations for comment during the public consultation process. We will build on this consultation process over the coming weeks and continue to be open to advice as we proceed with the important task of improving Ontario's property tax system in a fair, thoughtful and consistent manner.

We recognize the benefits that charities and similar organizations provide to communities all across Ontario. Under Bill 149, municipalities will be able to offer such

organizations tax rebates of up to 40% when they occupy business property.

To help municipalities administer this program, we are proposing an amendment that will clearly define which organizations can qualify for this rebate and will allow municipalities the flexibility to extend this benefit to other similar organizations, if they so wish.

We're also proposing an amendment to ensure that owners of vacant lands and buildings, which incurred no business occupancy tax under the old system, would retain similar tax treatment.

Through Bill 149, we are taking steps to ensure that the Ontario arts community can continue to thrive and contribute to the economy of our province. We are all proud that Metro Toronto's commercial live theatre industry is the third-largest in the world and attracts 90% of Ontario's live theatre audience. However, Metro's largest commercial theatres pay higher property taxes than their international competitors in New York and London and their publicly owned local competitors. Bill 149 will ensure that these theatres are treated in a fair way that reflects competitive realities.

We have listened to specific concerns raised by publicly owned theatres as well. In response, we are proposing an amendment to Bill 149 that recognizes the importance of not-for-profit operations such as the opera, ballet and symphony and acknowledges the difference between public theatres that are used mainly for not-for-profit productions and those primarily booked by commercial productions.

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We also recognize the vital contribution that small live theatres make to communities across the province and their importance as a training ground for the industry. Through Bill 149, these theatres will be exempt from property taxes.

On September 22, the government introduced legislation to exempt Metro's large commercial live theatres from education property tax to help these theatres compete on an international scale. Together, these measures will help support Toronto's competitiveness as an international theatre destination and support the viability of small theatres throughout the province.

In proposing changes to the tax treatment of farm land pending development, our goal is to fairly balance the needs of farmers, municipalities and developers. I look forward to hearing the views of all parties affected by this proposed amendment to ensure that Bill 149 achieves this balance. Fair, consistent tax treatment of rights-of-way properties is necessary to provide tax certainty as well.

It will also help prevent unpredictable tax increases and help stabilize revenue for municipalities. At present, railway, utility and hydro rights of way are taxed at different levels throughout the province. The current system of property tax creates a tax base that is uncertain and very uneven.

For example, under the current system, as a result of the last reassessment in the Halton region, railway properties faced a property tax increase of 500%. Under Bill 149, the province would set municipal tax levels per acre for rights-of-way properties in nine different geographic regions of the province. These regions are defined in the proposed regulation that we have introduced today.

Ontario's international bridges and tunnels play an important role in the development of the province's economy. To help keep Ontario competitive, we are replacing the existing hodgepodge system of assessing and taxing international bridges and tunnels. We are levelling the playing field and putting in place a more consistent system.

We have consulted with representatives of international crossings on our proposed changes. As a result of our intentions, the Peace Bridge Authority in Fort Erie recently announced the approval of phase 1 of a $200-million capital expansion project.

Quite obviously, fair property tax treatment does have a positive impact on economic development in this province. Previous governments have resisted fixing the property tax system because of the difficult issues which had to be faced. Clearly, this inaction was at the expense of property taxpayers and local governments. We are fixing the property tax system. Bill 149 is yet another example of that. It will help reduce barriers to investment and economic growth. It will improve Ontario's long-term competitiveness.

I look forward to hearing further from the people of Ontario on Bill 149. I can assure you that Bill 149, coupled with the reforms already passed in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, will give all Ontario property owners a system of property taxation and assessment that is fair, consistent and accountable. The people of Ontario deserve no less, and quite frankly it's about time.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Simcoe Centre): I'm pleased to join the debate and follow the Minister of Finance with respect to the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997 (No. 2), Bill 149. I'd like to deal with the bill in the context of the initial bill brought in through the Minister of Finance, Bill 106, the Fair Municipal Finance Act, which was introduced in January this year and proclaimed into law in May.

This legislation was the first step in the government's effort to make property assessment and taxation in Ontario fair, consistent and understandable so that taxpayers can hold their governments accountable. The act will be fair, because similar properties in a community with similar values will pay similar taxes. It will be understandable because when the Fair Municipal Finance Act goes into effect, properties across Ontario will be assessed based on their current value: what a willing buyer would pay a willing seller in an arm's-length transaction. It will be understandable because taxpayers will be able to determine how much tax they should pay simply by multiplying the assessed value of their properties by the appropriate municipal tax rate.

I take into consideration my own riding of Simcoe Centre, which is within the county of Simcoe. It's made up of 16 municipalities, seven towns and nine townships, plus the cities of Barrie and Orillia. As a result of two amal-

gamations, the number of county municipalities in Simcoe county has been reduced from 28 to 16. There has been no county-wide reassessment, although six municipalities were reassessed after the amalgamation. The old assessment base continues to apply to the other 10 municipalities. Barrie and Orillia are not part of the county structure.

It's interesting to note in terms of how the assessments are applied that for the city of Barrie the reassessment year for the tax year is 1987 for 1988, the base year is 1984, and the type of assessment is fair market value. In the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, it has not been reassessed and there are three parts to the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury. There is the town of Bradford, which has the assessment year for the tax year of 1985 for 1986 tax year and the base year is 1980. For the township of Tecumseth, which is part of this new town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, the reassessment year was 1988 and the base year is 1984 values. In the township of West Gwillimbury, the reassessment year was 1980 and the base year is 1975. In the town of Innisfil, within my riding, the reassessment year was 1995 for the tax year of 1996 and the base year for the assessment is 1992. Also within my riding there's the township of Springwater, with a reassessment year of 1995 for 1996 tax year, with a base year of 1992 values, and they are under the system of fair market value.

You can see that within three towns and one city within my riding you have different base years of assessment which range from 1975 up to 1992. The Fair Municipal Finance Act (No. 2), which is Bill 149, firmly builds on the fairness principles of the reforms the government introduced in January with the Fair Municipal Finance Act. The government has listened to specific concerns expressed by businesses, theatres, municipalities and other groups. We have heard those concerns, and the bill introduces measures that would respond to those legitimate concerns in a fair and balanced way.

Bill 149 includes measures that would mean fair tax treatment for small businesses and owners of business properties, publicly owned and commercial live theatres, municipalities, owners of rights-of-way property, charitable organizations, and farmers and developers.

I'd like to deal with a number of the components within the bill, specifically fairness for owners of business properties, small businesses in particular.

Bill 149 includes a measure that would enable municipalities to protect small standalone businesses. Municipalities will be able to support these small businesses by applying tiered tax rates to properties in the commercial property tax class. Small businesses in lower-valued commercial properties such as small neighbourhood shopping districts or retail strip malls could benefit from the provision. This provision would allow municipalities to create up to three bands of assessment.

Here is an example of how a municipality could put this measure to work: The municipality would set an appropriate threshold for commercial property values; for example, $250,000. The municipality could then apply a lower tax rate to assessed values that fall below the threshold and a higher tax rate for assessed values above the threshold. To ensure that municipalities can target specific businesses for higher taxes, the government can prescribe restrictions on the use of this provision in regulation.

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This measure addresses the concerns of small businesses in a way that avoids creating large amounts of red tape for municipalities, and I think it's important because when you look at the context of what we're trying to do here in terms of small business, we're trying to ensure that commercial business sectors are not only kept vibrant, but certainly material within the community, and one of the measures the government is committed to in reform is the business improvement areas in Bill 106.

The government recognizes the important role played by business improvement areas in maintaining healthy, vibrant commercial areas. The changes to the business improvement area legislation are the result of our commitment to rationalizing the property tax system and eliminating the business occupancy tax.

While the changes in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997, will affect some aspects of the BIA operations, the government believes that overall the act will not seriously disrupt these functions. In some ways it will be a better support to the BIAs by creating BIA levies in the same manner as property tax. The changes come about because of the changes to the business occupancy tax in terms of the 50% tax that is applied to commercial properties where there is a business occupying that property, and that's going to be done away with.

The concern that was expressed by business improvement areas was that with that occupancy tax being taken away, what would happen to their business improvement areas? What is going to happen is that they will be continued, and it certainly will have the landlord take a greater role with respect to those business improvement areas. That makes sense, because it's not just the businesses, it's also the landlord that owns the building within which the business operates.

I believe the changes that we're bringing about through Bill 149, the Fair Municipal Finance Act (No. 2) and the measures we brought through on Bill 106 are complementary in terms of our focus on small business, to make sure they are not only viable in terms of being able to operate their business and pay their taxes, but also we create a structure in the commercial core where small businesses can not only thrive but certainly prosper.

The next area I'd like to deal with is vacant business lands and units. Bill 149 would provide fair treatment for owners of vacant business lands and units by recognizing that these properties don't currently pay business occupancy tax. The bill proposes these properties should be taxed a lower rate to recognize the absence of business activity.

That's a fairly important concern for owners of vacant property where the business has not made it or moved and you have a vacant building and you're being taxed at the commercial rate, yet you have no business activity on that property. The previous practice was for the landlord to

apply to the municipality to have a different rate structure. It would be changed to residential, which doesn't make a lot of sense, if you own commercially zoned property, to revert to a residential rate.

The changes with respect to the vacant business lands and units will ensure that the rate reduction will be in the legislation rather than dealing with it through regulation.

We are proposing rate reductions of 30% of the full commercial rate for commercial properties and 35% of the industrial rate for industrial properties. This measure would, on average, retain the business occupancy tax preference that vacant business lands and units now have and ensure they are not unduly affected by reform.

With respect to municipalities, Bill 149 gives municipalities flexibility in how they implement a number of tax provisions; for example, charitable organizations. Bill 149 would give municipalities the power to protect significant charities. This would recognize the benefits that charities and similar organizations provide to communities. These organizations could receive tax rebates from the municipality of up to 40% of their total property tax on space that they occupy in commercial or industrial properties. The rebate program would ensure the benefit would go directly to the charity.

To help municipalities administer the program, the government proposes an amendment that would define the charities that are eligible with reference to the well-known definition contained in the federal Income Tax Act. Municipalities would also have the flexibility under Bill 149 to extend this definition of charities to similar organizations if they choose to do so.

Bill 149 will give municipalities the option to decide if this program meets their local needs and priorities. For example, if there are few non-profit organizations in a municipality, the municipality may decide it is more cost-effective to provide support through existing mechanisms.

Another area that I think is important, especially in areas that are in a developmental mode with respect to cities and townships in the surrounding area, and also where there's agricultural property and you're seeing growth in the residential sector — and there's a good example within my riding in the city of Barrie and in the township of Bradford West Gwillimbury and even in the township of Innisfil — the farm lands pending development, there certainly hasn't been a consistent approach in terms of how to deal with this property to fairly balance the needs of farmers, developers and municipalities.

The bill will preserve farm land and encourage bona fide farming. It will encourage development-ready land at a reasonable cost and ensure that municipalities receive a fair rate of property tax according to the use and value of the land.

That's certainly important in that if the property was previously a farm and is not an active farm any more and it has been rezoned to residential but there's no building going on because the developer is not in a position to build due to market concerns, he shouldn't be taxed at a higher level where the property isn't even being utilized.

By proposing three tax rate ranges for different stages of development, Bill 149 will give municipalities the flexibility to address their particular situations. At the same time, the bill would provide an incentive to continue farming on lands that are awaiting development and maintain a tax reduction for these lands.

The next area I'd like to address is rights of way. Bill 149 would bring fairness and consistency to the tax treatment of Ontario Hydro, utility and railway rights of way. That certainly is a big issue in this day and age in terms of railway as a result of the federal government's legislation which they brought in last year in terms of allowing CN and CP to discontinue their rail lines.

I believe that certainly there are some tax considerations that face municipalities that have rail lines that go through their communities. The bill would correct serious inequities in the way these properties are now assessed and taxed. Currently, rights of way are taxed at different effective tax rates throughout the province. Bill 149 proposes to replace that patchwork of tax rates by setting tax levels per acre for nine geographic areas of the province. The proposed approach would provide municipalities with a stable revenue base and would also recognize the need for provincial controls on the taxation of these unique properties that are key to the provincial economy.

With respect to taxpayers, the Fair Municipal Finance Act required municipalities to provide a program of municipal tax relief for low-income property owners who are seniors or who have disabilities. Bill 149 proposes to apply this tax relief to the education portion of their property taxes as well.

As you know, we have been dealing with education and with the taxation structure there. The government has proposed that the province and not school boards would be responsible for setting all education property tax rates. The province would set rates for residential properties. The municipality would collect the taxes and forward the revenues to the local school boards. Supporters of public, separate or French-language education would continue to have the right to identify their support for the school system of their choice, and the government has stated that once these rates are set for 1998, they would be frozen. That's certainly good news for residential taxpayers in terms of planning their own future and their needs and their budgeting.

The province would also set the rates for business support for education. Municipalities would collect these revenues and forward them to the local district school boards on the basis of enrolment. In addition, the province would use other provincial revenues to pay for the grants which all school boards would receive based on student need.

In the province as a whole, residential education tax revenue will be cut in half, from $5 billion to $2.5 billion. Under the new system, all residential taxpayers will pay for education at the same rate. That only makes sense for a common service such as education.

Certainly Bill 149, along with the measures that were taken with respect to improving education and fairness

with respect to taxation in education in municipalities and through the province, is consistent with the approach we're taking now.

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The Fair Municipal Finance Act also allows municipalities to phase in municipal tax changes resulting from reassessment over a period of up to eight years. That's of fundamental importance to any taxpayers and to municipal politicians who have to bring the tax system into the system we're proposing in terms of fairness and having a set rate. But it's not fair to just push that on to the taxpayer all at once when you've had communities that have had assessment rates that are not current. We are in the year 1997, and if you live in a community where the assessment rate is based on 1975 values, you're certainly looking at a significant change. I think that type of measure, which could be viewed as a sunset provision in terms of giving municipalities eight years to bring the tax changes into effect and up to the standard, is extremely fair.

Bill 149 would ensure that this fairness measure also applies to the education portion of the property tax. These proposed measures would ensure that education taxes parallel municipal taxes. They would also ensure that providing education tax relief won't cost municipalities more money and will avoid the cost and red tape of introducing provincial programs.

On that note, I am very pleased to have joined the debate today. I support this bill. I think it's going to bring significant change, along with the initial bill with respect to fair municipal finance reform earlier this year. I look forward to the changes the government is bringing forth with respect to education taxation. I think the measures being taken are fair not only to municipalities and school boards but also, and most important, to the taxpayers of the province. We should remember there is only one taxpayer and we have to be fair.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): I too am very pleased today to have the opportunity to share a few of my thoughts on the Fair Municipal Finance Act, (No. 2), better known as Bill 149. The purpose and goal of this legislation are clearly expressed in the name of the act.

Our current system of property taxes is difficult to understand, and I suggest it is very frustrating and unfair to the taxpayers of this province. Currently we have such a complicated process to arrive at property taxes, ie, equalized assessment, that most municipal administrators have difficulty understanding the current property tax system, let alone the general public, the taxpayers of this province. The disparities in our property tax system are enormous, but today I believe, as we debate Bill 149, we are one step closer to improving the overall property tax system.

For too long, previous provincial and municipal governments made it quite clear that the current property tax system did not work well. In my years as a municipal councillor, this situation became quite evident and was very evident on a daily basis. Over the years, as municipalities developed their own systems for property evaluation, discrepancies arose between neighbouring municipalities and in many cases between different areas within the same municipality. For example, in a couple of the municipalities in Peterborough county, local assessments have not been updated since the late 1940s.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I am fascinated by my friend's comments and I'm sure most members of the assembly would like to hear them. Could you check to see if there is a quorum present?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs Marion Boyd): Clerk, would you check for a quorum.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Peterborough.

Mr Stewart: I am pleased that the honourable member suggested my words of wisdom were worth hearing. I thank you, sir, very much.

For example, in a couple of the municipalities in Peterborough county, in the area where I'm from, local assessments have not been updated since the late 1940s. That was 50 years ago. I know change is slow and in some cases difficult, but I believe that inequity is totally ridiculous. We began seeing cases where similar properties could receive widely different assessments, resulting in property taxes that were unfair.

After being elected in 1995, one of the very first problems a constituent brought to my office was a dispute regarding his property assessment and the amount of tax he had to pay. This individual was paying more taxes than a neighbour with a house and lot of equal value. My friends, that is not fair. The taxpayers of this province should not be paying different rates of taxation on properties of equal value. This individual also found similar homes in different areas of the city that were paying, again, different rates of taxes. It appears they were being assessed for areas rather than looking at what the house and the lot consisted of. This, I believe, is totally unfair.

In Metro there are situations where similar houses on one side of the street pay a different amount of tax than persons across the street in like houses. This is not fair. A new property tax system and, I believe, a new unified Toronto will help correct this type of disparity.

One of the major reasons that property tax reform has not occurred is because the total tax burden for the people of Ontario is simply too high. Tax levels are so high that there is very little fiscal room for compromise or reform, but I believe we are addressing this issue. We are addressing the total tax problem.

The first step towards total and complete tax reform must be a strategy to reduce all taxes by cutting the size and cost of government. This has to be done at all levels, and when I suggest all levels I'm talking about federal government, provincial government and municipal government alike, something this government can never be accused of not doing. We are creating a more efficient and effective government, and as a result we are seeing greater opportunities to address the issue that no other government

has addressed before. The issue is property tax reform. Granted, previous governments expressed an interest in reforming the property tax system but did not have the political will to do so.

Currently many inequities exist within the province's municipalities. Assessments are calculated differently across Ontario. Some properties are assessed based on an estimation of their market value while others are assessed based on a percentage of their value. The failure of previous governments to act on this important issue has done nothing but cost the taxpayers of this province valuable tax dollars. However, with the introduction of the fair assessment system which reassesses all properties at their current value as of June 30, 1996, we are creating a much fairer, equitable property tax system.

Bill 149 represents the second step in a move to create a property tax system that taxpayers will understand and trust, and most important, can afford. Bill 149 gives municipalities something they have always asked for: flexibility in the area of taxation. This bill allows upper- and lower-tier municipalities to set lower tax rates for lower-valued commercial properties by creating multi-tiered commercial tax rates. In the small business world, which is the foundation of business in this province, they have to have a fair and equitable system. This principle will also give municipalities the opportunity to set tax rates in a manner that meets the needs of their local community. This is the type of flexibility municipalities have been calling for.

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As we saw in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, municipalities are allowed to phase in municipal tax changes resulting from reassessment over a period of eight years. This phase-in will provide added security not only for seniors on fixed incomes and Ontarians with disabilities but indeed security for all of the province.

Bill 149 also deals with railways, utilities in Ontario and hydro rights of way. Currently, all three of these features are taxed at different levels throughout the province, once again creating a system that is uncertain depending on what part of the province you live in — a totally ridiculous situation. With this bill, we are proposing that the province would set municipal tax levels on a per-acre basis for nine regions of Ontario and then average the tax changes. This will go to great lengths to level the playing field across the province, stabilize the revenue base for municipalities and prevent large tax increases.

The issue of vacant and industrial property has also been a problem for many municipalities and one that we are addressing head on. Under the Fair Municipal Finance Act, the business occupancy tax has been eliminated. This allows municipalities to recover this revenue from property classes that previously paid this tax. Vacant business land and units will be taxed at a lower rate.

Charities will also benefit from our property tax reforms. Municipalities will be able to provide rebates to charitable organizations occupying business property. Isn't that great, that the charities will now be able to have additional dollars to fund the many needed projects that we want and ask them as partners to do in this province. Rebates could be up to 40% of the total amount of tax. This will allow all municipalities to recognize that these groups paid tax at the lower-end residential rate and did not pay the business occupancy tax.

Currently farm land that is being purchased by a developer is assessed as farm land until farming stops. Some farm land undergoing development attracts very little property tax relative to its value. However, this new bill proposes a tiered approach to the taxation of farm land pending development. This measure would fairly balance the need of farmers, developers and municipalities.

At a recent UDI meeting, one of the lawyers who was a guest speaker at that particular function made a comment about 200-acre parcels across a county road from each other. One was assessed as normal farm land, owned by the same developer as the other one, which was assessed as a commercial operation, or would have been residential. The variance was something like $200,000 worth of taxes. It makes it very difficult for developments to start, with that type of taxation.

The farm tax rebate was a stopgap measure created to assist farmers until a new property tax system was developed that would tax farm land, residential and commercial property in a fair and equitable way. We are doing that. You know, that stopgap measure lasted an unbelievable number of years.

Finally, as municipalities restructure and grow, land is often annexed to accommodate growth. Bill 149 would prevent municipalities that annex unincorporated land from shifting taxes on to property classes that already pay unfairly high taxes.

My friends, Bill 149 is part of a greater package of legislative reform designed to get Ontario working again. Bill 149, in conjunction with our Who Does What initiative, will make the overall property tax system a much fairer system if real restructuring takes place at the local level.

At the end of the day, it is the taxpayer who must pay the bills, and for too long property taxpayers in newly assessed areas have been footing the bill for those living in areas which have not been reassessed for many years. This is simply not right.

Our government is finally addressing the inequities in our property tax system. We are reducing the entire tax burden on the people of Ontario. We are reducing income taxes for the good of Ontario and we are reforming the property tax system, also for the good of Ontario. Total and complete reform of our current system of government can and will lead to tax reductions for taxpayers of Ontario as real change is embraced. Bill 149, coupled with the reforms in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, will give all Ontario taxpayers a system of property assessment and taxation that is fair, consistent, understandable and indeed accountable.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I appreciate the comments of all three government members. I would ask them to respond to two or three things in

their response. First, I know the government is moving ahead with imposing market value assessment. I'm just curious about why, before the election, it was Mike Harris's position that they "would never impose market value assessment on Toronto. We remain firm in that position." Maybe the member can answer why Mike Harris said before the election he would never do this and why now, after the election, he is doing it. That was a piece of literature put out by them.

The second thing is that the member has mentioned eliminating the business occupancy tax. That is going to cause some significant dislocation for small business. To date in the bill we've yet to see how the government plans to accommodate it. I've just looked through the proposed regulations and the amendments and there's no indication of how the government plans to help small business. It was the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that in a letter to the government said: "Ironically, the elimination of the business occupancy tax will harm our sector. Smaller firms are concentrated at the low end of the business occupancy tax." It goes on to say that with the elimination of that, they're likely going to face substantial increases. I hope the member can give us an answer on that.

The third thing I'd like from the member: I'd like to know the logic of taxing an acre of land for hydro in downtown Peterborough at exactly the same rate as an acre of land for hydro in the middle of the Haliburton forest. I just want to know the logic of that. If a piece of land is worth something in one area, is it worth exactly the same in another area?

1600

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): I too wish to convey in the spirit of sympathy — I've listened intently to the spin, the diatribe as we enter debate on Bill 149. Bill 149 is only the offspring of Bill 106 — doing so at their own peril — for their ill-fated legislation does not work in isolation.

There are winners and losers. None of the three speakers mentioned anything about the bank towers. Under the BOT, the business occupancy tax, they've won the lottery. Those are the people who take in the money big time. They're the winners. A large corporation, for instance in Oakville, the plant operator in the automotive industry will benefit $18 million. The logical question is, who's going to pick up the slack? Where will that $18 million come from? Will Mike Harris and his cohorts send a cheque in the mail to the clerk-administrator of Oakville? They won't. The difference, the slack will have to be made up. It will be made up by residential taxpayers and also by small business people, the commercial assessment.

CNCP will get a break on account of amendments vis-à-vis rights of way. Hydro will also get a break. In the case of Hydro, the mess they're in, they need every penny they can get. But CNCP, whose appetites are insatiable, have been given huge tracts of land since Confederation. It's well documented; we all know. Dozens of books have been written about those people. But la payola, their friends are giving them another tax break.

The Acting Speaker: Further comments and questions?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: I believe the member for Simcoe Centre was one of the speakers. I don't believe you can comment on your own speech.

Ms Isabel Bassett (St Andrew-St Patrick): I would like to thank the member for Scarborough-Agincourt and my colleagues for their comments today. Ontarians know that our property tax system needs fixing. They have communicated that to us very clearly, so when we were elected we said we would make the property tax system fairer, and that's exactly what we have done.

Bill 149 is building on Bill 106, which was favourably received by many sectors of society, and it makes the tax system much fairer. This bill, Bill 149, carries on and it ensures the fair treatment of farms, small businesses and other commercial and industrial properties. It gives municipalities more flexibility to respond effectively to local priorities. It further protects low-income seniors and the disabled. It also closes tax loopholes to help stabilize the tax base for the future.

I feel that Bill 149 takes Ontarians a step closer to having a much fairer and more equitable tax system. I feel, after many consultations, and there will be more consultations, that this will come back and that will be the message we get.

The Acting Speaker: Further comments? Seeing none, response?

Mr Tascona: I'd just like to respond to the comments made by the honourable members. What we're dealing with here is that in terms of market value assessment, there seems to be confusion in terms of how you value the property. What we're not dealing with here is the highest and best use. There seems to be confusion there. We're looking at the actual usage of the property and its actual value assessment, which is based on a three-year rolling average.

The benefit of this, which was pointed out by the member for Peterborough, when you're dealing with a discrepancy in terms of one part of a community being assessed at 1975 values and another part being assessed at 1997 values, is that some significant changes have to be made. We've addressed that through the three-year rolling average and having it set up in 1996 and the implementation period, which is an eight-year period.

What is important in terms of trying to stimulate economic growth is that having a three-tier system for small businesses and lower-valued commercial property I think all parties should hail as something that's fair to small business and certainly will lead to economic growth. Also, looking at agricultural land in terms of how it is used and when it is purchased for developmental purposes, we should not be looking at an approach that really makes it difficult for the person who has purchased the property to hold it and be able to develop it.

I think the replies weren't on point. I just wanted to comment on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Further debate?

Mr Phillips: I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate and to say that it will be my intention to share my time with the members for Windsor-Walkerville and Essex South.

I want to simply say on Bill 149 that this is, as the public knows, the second of two major bills on property tax reform, that this will be the most dramatic change in property tax in the history of Ontario. The analogy I used with our caucus was that it's a bit like the early gathering of a hurricane off the Florida coast in its first moments, but this hurricane hits Ontario in a few months. It will fundamentally change the whole property tax system in Ontario.

The concerns I want to raise today are ones that we anticipate will hit Ontario in March or April 1998. The reason we say "anticipate" is because the government has chosen to provide virtually no information on the impact of these bills. I've never seen a government making such a major decision that will impact literally every home and every business in Ontario without at least saying, "Here's likely going to be the impact." Mike Harris says, "I'm going to run our government like a business." No business would ever make these fundamental decisions without having some idea of their impact. I'm surprised, as I've always been, that the back bench haven't demanded it, because I can guarantee you that when this hits it will have huge impacts on communities across the province. I want to begin to spell those out and to suggest that the government perhaps has not done its homework in these areas.

First is the elimination of the business occupancy tax. As my colleague said, the average bank tower in the city of Toronto will likely have its taxes decreased by $3 million a year. That's the estimate that has been provided: $3 million a year. It is going to be made up by the rest of the business sector. Their taxes go down; someone else's taxes go up.

I point out what I said earlier in my remarks, that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business warned us that in a strange way the elimination of the business occupancy tax, which is a tax that's 90 years old, archaic and out of date for sure, without some idea of how it is going to impact on small business — in CFIB's mind, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the elimination of the business occupancy tax, strangely enough, will likely represent a negative impact on their businesses. I had hoped today that we would see from the government its plans for how it planned to deal with that. I've been through the proposed amendments and the proposed regulations, and it's not there. That is our first concern, that small business is going to be hurt by the elimination of the business occupancy tax. We have yet to see how the government plans to deal with that. That's our first concern, which I hope all members in the Legislature share.

1610

Our second concern — this is a more minor point but I had hoped I would have got an answer from the government on this — is that this bill, Bill 149, calls for the province setting the property tax rate on hydro lands, on utility rights of way and on rail lands. The province is going to do that. It's going to set the mill rate on the land.

I'm trying to figure the logic of the government's decision here. What the government is saying is that they will tax an acre of CPR land down at the Gardiner Expressway and Yonge Street, that an acre of land there will pay exactly the same taxes as an acre of rail land up around Lake Simcoe. I'm trying to find the logic of that. Where is the logic of an acre of land in downtown Toronto paying exactly the same property tax rate as an acre of land up around Lake Simcoe? I have not had the logic of that. That's in this bill.

In its property tax plans, for the first time in the history of the province, the government of Ontario is going to play a huge role in setting the mill rates for property taxes. I hope everybody follows this: On average, half of our residential property tax goes to education, half goes to our local councils or our regional councils. The government has said, "We are going to take away half of the education expense, we're going to leave the other half on the residential property tax and we'll set the mill rate."

The government has also determined that they're going to leave all of the educational costs on business. I think many people in the business community, when they heard the government say, "We're going to take education off property tax," thought they would be getting some relief, but 100% of the property tax on business in these bills remains.

The government will be setting the mill rate for the first time ever; for over half of the property tax, the mill rate for businesses will now be set by the provincial government. It's quite an extraordinary move for a province to move into property tax in that way. Certainly it has never happened before in Ontario. The provincial government has never set mill rates and taken property tax money like this.

Yet even today I asked the Minister of Finance during question period: "What is your plan for this? Are you going to have a uniform mill rate for businesses across the province? Are you prepared to say that you are going to freeze the amount of money you'll raise from business, or are you freezing the mill rate?" In his response to me he indicated, "Well, we're going to be dealing with the bill later today and you'll be getting those answers later today." The answers aren't there. We do not know how the government plans to set mill rates on businesses.

I say to the business community that you should be concerned about where property tax is going, for these reasons: They've left all of the education that was currently on business still there. They've now downloaded on to the property tax all of social housing; 100% of social housing now has gone from the province on to property tax. A whole new area of expense in welfare or social assistance has now shifted from the province on to property tax.

The reason the business community should be speaking out on this is that I guarantee you that Ontario, at some

stage in the future, will go through a tough economic period. That's just the way it works. We have good economic times and then tougher economic times. Here's what's going to happen: As soon as that happens, as soon as we run into difficult economic times, our business community should recognize that the expenses for social assistance, for social housing, inevitably go up. That's just the way it is. The business community now in some respects have got the worst of all worlds, from their perspective. They've still got all the education costs they had before and now they've loaded on social housing, and many of those are seniors.

I would just say to our business community who say, "I guess they must have studied this and I guess it's the right thing to do," that the business community should be aware that the government appointed a group of 15 people — it was called the Who Does What committee, headed by David Crombie; that's how people may recognize it — to study this matter, to say what things should be on property tax and what things should be handled by the province.

Hopefully I can find the quote, but if I can't, I can remember it fairly well anyway. In his report, David Crombie and all the other commissioners — Mike Harris picked these people, every single one of them — said: "The panel strongly opposes such a move" — putting social housing and social assistance on property tax — "We are unanimous in the view that it shouldn't be done."

The reason I raise this is that I think the business community can look down the road at the pressures property tax will face in difficult economic times. The business community knows as well or better than anyone what happens in difficult economic times. You can just imagine, they've still got all of education that they had before, and now they've got social housing, social assistance, child care, ambulances, public health. The business community now is going to be picking up those costs.

The business community will find those councils facing some terrible, terrible choices, as we can all visualize. Many of the members here have previously been on councils and you can just imagine an economic downturn and people needing help on housing, help on social assistance, understandably, and the battle that will go on around property tax. This is a package and we are dealing with the government making a decision to put all these new costs on to property tax.

One of the difficulties we're going to run into is that, at exactly the same time as this change is coming in — I might say, this change is monumental. I think all of us understand that. Every single property in the province is being reassessed. There will be thousands, if not tens of thousands, of appeals going on a year from now. There will be mass confusion out there, and at the same time this is happening the government has decided, as we've just talked about, to download all these services on to the municipalities, plus add $660 million of extra costs on to the property tax.

Here in the Legislature, we get into a big debate, "Well, it's revenue-neutral; it isn't revenue-neutral." But the government has acknowledged that it has cut out a $666-million municipal support grant. In 1997 they are providing municipalities with $660 million; in 1998 the number will be zero. In addition to all the other problems municipalities will face — believe me they will face huge challenges, particularly many brand new councils coming in, new boundaries, huge new responsibilities for things like social housing, and at the same time they're being told they've got to pick up another $660 million of previous provincial costs that are now on the municipalities. On the property tax bill, we have to view it within that context.

1620

I will speak just briefly about the assessment process because I've been hearing for some time now about the concerns that particularly our professional assessor community has about the approach that's being done. This thing has been rushed, there have been a lot of inexperienced people hired to do it and it is in serious jeopardy of being credible when it's finally announced.

The bill today deals with several aspects to in some respects correct some of the challenges in the previous bill, Bill 106, that we passed several months ago, to expand a little bit on the responsibilities.

Some of the themes that are in Bill 149: I think Bill 149 is almost unprecedented in giving the Minister of Finance the authority to set taxes. I think there are 25 areas here where the Minister of Finance will have the authority to set taxes. I'm not a constitutional expert, but I always thought that it was up to the duly elected bodies to set taxes, not to delegate to a minister tax-setting policy that he can do through regulation. What does that mean for the public? It means that the minister can set, for example, the tax rate on the hydro lines I just talked about; the minister can set the tax rate on those three levels of commercial we talked about. It's unusual.

I'm particularly surprised actually at the Conservative back bench agreeing with a bill that gives that much discretionary power to a cabinet without the public scrutiny and without the public input, because we've all learned that governments come and go and you should also assume that the laws you're passing now could be in the hands of one of the dreaded opposition parties at some stage.

Mr Douglas B. Ford (Etobicoke-Humber): Yes, I agree.

Mr Phillips: Mr Ford is frightened by that thought. I'm just saying to you that this is a law for some time and I would urge you to question, as we have been doing, whether it's appropriate for the minister to have this level of authority. I must say that I raised this question in the Legislature a couple of weeks ago and the Minister of Finance himself said, "I've got some questions myself about any Minister of Finance having that much discretionary authority."

To keep moving on the bill and the areas of concern on the bill, and I will say this is an overview as well, our party has said all along that while we have disagreements with the bill, while we have areas that we think the bill is deficient in, while we have serious concerns about the lack of information, we are not going to do anything that will slow up the bill in terms of ensuring that the government

gets this bill passed on its timetable so that it can be implemented as smoothly as possible. The worst possible thing is that this thing be implemented at the last minute.

Frankly, I think the government has been negligent. We should have been dealing with this months ago. The government should have had its act together months ago so that the municipalities could have some idea of what they're dealing with. I just want to say that our caucus has at every step of the way, when the government has said, "We want to be dealing with this," been prepared to deal with it. We believe that we need some public hearings on this, but I think the government itself acknowledges that. I want to be clear and on the record on behalf of our caucus that we have cooperated on both of these bills to make certain they were not held up by the opposition. They've been held up, in my opinion, because the government has had difficulty in getting its act together.

In terms of some of the other issues within this particular bill and some of the concerns we have, I've already talked a lot about the rights of way and what is the policy logic in that. The government has talked about the multi-tier tax rate, where they would have different tax rates for different values of commercial property. They haven't spelled any of that out. I'd hoped we would have seen that today. I'm anxious to find out what they have in mind here, because we are trying to bring in this bill an element of fairness and equity across all of the sectors.

I'm anxious to find out the specific proposals here. For example, if it means that if the building is valued at $500,000, it will pay one tax rate, if it's valued at $2 million, another tax rate, and above $2 million, another tax rate, there's a possibility of some inequities there, because if you rent from a building valued at $500,000, presumably that tax rate's lower than if you rent from a building worth $2 million. It isn't business-specific. It's owner-specific, building-specific rather than business-specific. If the intent is to help businesses and not the owner of the building, then I'm anxious to find out how the government plans to do this.

I also wanted to comment briefly on the use of market value assessment. I raise this because I gather the government, when they got elected, looked at all the options and said: "This is the only one. This is the best one we can find." But I just say to the members — I represent a Metropolitan Toronto riding — that Mike Harris could not have been clearer before the election. I guarantee you, Al Leach would never have been elected if he hadn't made a promise to never, ever bring in market value assessment. If he hadn't made that promise, he wouldn't be here today. There are two or three — Mr Saunderson and Ms Bassett — who made the same promise and are here for the same reasons. Mike Harris was very clear on it: "The policy of the PC Party has always been that we will never impose market value assessment on Toronto. We remain firm in that position." I hate to harp on that, but I'm just saying that's what your members solemnly promised. I'm not being bitter about this — it was quite a nasty attack on the Liberals too — but that's how many of your members got elected. You're going to have to live with that.

You may have examined all the alternatives and said — actually, Mike Harris has never said this — "I'm sorry, but we made a mistake. We shouldn't have done that. We're going with the best possible tax system, but we are implementing market value assessment." The definition in the bill is identical to the market value assessment in the old bill and it's going to be mildly — well, more than mildly — embarrassing for Mr Leach and others to explain. People keep these things. They don't just disappear. They don't disintegrate. They're all still around.

I want to go on to some other questions that we may get answers to at the committee. Payments in lieu of taxes: This is a huge issue for some communities around Ontario, particularly for Kingston, Ottawa and others where there's a substantial payment in lieu of taxes, particularly by the federal government. It looks to me, in reading the proposed bill, that the provincial government has decided to take those revenues into its own hands. If that is the case, and that's how I read the bill, there will be some real concern in some of the communities such as Kingston and Ottawa.

1630

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: On this very important bill we do not appear to have a quorum. Would you call quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Would you check to see if there is a quorum present, please.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Scarborough-Agincourt.

Mr Phillips: I was just going over parts of the bill that are of concern to us and I was talking about the payments in lieu of taxes and indicating that I think some of the communities like Kingston and Ottawa will want to look very carefully at that, because it does appear to us as a grab by the provincial government.

I also want to talk about the changes that are being made in restricting the right of our first nations for land claims. As I read this, it appears that there are some moves to limit the opportunity for the first nations to look at some additional claims. I want to signal that we've had concerns raised by the first nations and they will want to talk at committee on it. I wanted to raise that.

As well, there are a few other smaller details. The bill presupposes that we pass the education finance bill and it takes some moves here to remove the requirement to identify separate public school support. The government indicated to us in a briefing, "The reason we're doing that is because we plan to pass a bill around financing of education that will make that unnecessary." I would just say that we've yet to see that bill, that in the absence of that bill we wanted to indicate our concern about possible elimination of separate school designation in some areas, not in

all areas, and to indicate that until we see the companion bill we will have some significant problems with it.

The other part of the bill that is perhaps most troubling to us is that, as I said earlier, it is being implemented without any opportunity for any of us to look at what the impact will be. I hope you understand why we are increasingly sceptical about how well thought out these bills are. I can remember the first indication I had about being sceptical was Bill 26. We all remember the first major bill that came in, the big omnibus bill. It was seriously flawed. The government itself amended it 150 times. We've seen, as I've said before, toll roads with no tolls; we've seen prisons with no prisoners; we've seen the Minister of Education one day proudly announcing that a cornerstone of their education plan was that the schools would open a week before Labour Day and the very next day saying, "I've changed my mind; they are not going to open."

These are indications that the government has not thought through its proposals, whether it be what's going on right now with our hospitals, where the Ontario Hospital Association itself said, "Listen, this thing isn't properly thought through; you've got to slow down. You are tearing the system apart"; whether it be in our education system, where one of the first things the Minister of Education did was say, "An organization like this has to create a crisis to change." Well, he has successfully accomplished that, but we don't know how he wants to change it.

So you can understand how we are sceptical about where the bill is going. The fact is that the government refuses to give any studies at all, just to say, "Listen, how is this business occupancy tax going to hurt small business?" I repeat, each of the bank towers will be worth $30 million more the day the bill is passed than the day before it was passed. They're going to have a huge tax break, and I understand that, but somebody's got to pick that up and it probably will be small business. What I'm looking forward to, and what I'd hoped we would get today, are the details on how the government plans to address those problems with small business.

To begin my conclusion and turn it over to my colleagues, there is nobody in the province who doesn't believe we need change in property tax law. I don't think anybody who presented to our committee didn't say that. There's no one in this Legislature who doesn't believe there needs to be a substantial change in property tax. The concern we have is we are now three months away from this, the most sweeping change in the history of the province. All of this is coming in, in our opinion, without being thought through clearly. The fact that we don't know even today how the government plans to deal with small business is an indication of that. And at exactly the same time as this is coming in, you're going to have all new councils but many with whole new structures, school boards fundamentally changing and the province setting mill rates on residential property taxes, huge mill rates on business property taxes. We are facing the unprecedented changes in our health care system. If you want to write a recipe for chaos, this would be it. This is how you would create chaos. This bill looks to us like it hasn't been thought through to the end.

I've raised questions on some of our major concerns about it. We're looking forward to the committee hearings, looking forward to some input from our municipal leaders, from our business leaders, from our community leaders, to see if we can't find ways we can improve this bill and make it operate as smoothly as possible.

1640

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): It's a pleasure to be following my colleague the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, our caucus's critic on finance and economic affairs, who has done his usual thoughtful job of analysing a bill that is one in a series of bills that deals with virtually every aspect of how we finance and pay for municipal governance and the functions we associate with municipal governance and education in Ontario.

I want to begin today by looking at the government's broad context of legislation in this area and add to my colleague's observations with respect to the bill itself as well as the context the bill is in, and try to relate to the House and to members in the House some of the impacts I believe will fall out of this bill, particularly for my community and the area I represent in the Legislative Assembly.

When we consider this bill, we have to, as my colleague indicated, consider it in the context of both Bill 106 and the government's intentions with respect to Who Does What, downloading, the realignment of the provision of education and municipal services in Ontario. We have to bear in mind all aspects of the debate.

We are about to embark on or are in the process of reassessing every property in Ontario: every commercial property, every residential property. We are using people, many of whom aren't particularly well trained. We on this side of the House are already starting to hear issues around competence, ability, because we're putting these people out without a heck of a lot of training, without a lot of background. Like many members in the House, I started my public life in municipal government — I spent six years on our municipal council — and I remember that the questions around assessment were always thorny, difficult issues that often required great thought and consideration, especially when you're dealing with people's property.

So we have this happening on the one hand, we have this reassessment. I understand that the government has termed what they're doing here "actual value assessment," which means market value assessment. Like the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, I remember very clearly the Premier's commitment that we won't have market value assessment, and I also remember his commitment that we wouldn't close hospitals, and I remember his commitment that we wouldn't cut funding from classroom education, and I remember his commitment that we wouldn't affect law enforcement in Ontario.

What we are confronted with is a theme from a government. We are seeing a government that is struggling to keep its commitments, and they haven't kept their com-

mitments. They said they could balance the budget, reduce taxes 30% and not touch education, health care or community policing. That's tomfoolery, absolute tomfoolery. What do we have? We have a government that prides itself on fiscal management that can't get its credit rating improved. Why? Because you've sacrificed $5 billion a year in revenue and you don't know how you're going to make it up.

What you're doing is backtracking every step of the way. I say to you, we on this side understand that your first priority should have been to balance the budget, and there ought not to have been a tax cut until the budget was balanced. Had you taken that approach, you might have had your budget balanced next year, like the federal government. Instead, you've created a situation where you will have to raise property taxes on every property owner in this province. There will be hell to pay for you in two years, because those property owners will lay it right at your feet. Why? Because this bill operationalizes the property tax grab. This bill and Bill 106 operationalize it.

In Windsor, for instance, the net result of the download from Mike Harris is that property taxpayers in Windsor will have to pick up an additional $27 million. That works out to roughly a 27% mill rate increase. That's assuming the assessment issue is equal, that is, that the reassessment that's going on in our community doesn't have an even further impact. I should tell members opposite that I've met with our local officials and they're concerned about that.

We went through market value assessment in 1984. We went through the difficulties associated with that. There are always winners and losers. We are glad to have the reassessment that is going on, but we are concerned about the outcome. As my colleague from Scarborough indicated, we should be concerned about the outcome.

We think about many bills. For instance, yesterday we were talking about the Family Law Act and the family support plan offices. You went in and closed the family support plan offices. You didn't give it much thought. You left literally thousands of people, the most vulnerable people in this province, in a bad situation. We saw the Minister of Education last week saying, "We're going to start school a week before Labour Day," and now he's saying he's not going to do that, that he'd consulted and changed his mind. Couldn't he have done that before he introduced the bill? We had that figured out, and so did everyone else in the province.

We think about Bill 26. Just last week we had a court ruling saying that Bill 26, a key component of your bill, is unconstitutional and striking it down.

Interjection.

Mr Duncan: Yes, to the members opposite, the speeches are similar because the themes are similar. This bill represents yet another example of what happens when you don't think things through.

The member from Mississauga long advocated stiffer fines and stiffer penalties around drunk driving provisions, and what happens? We don't do it right. We're back to the drawing board again, no further ahead.

We submit to the government that we ought to think about not only what we're doing but how we're doing it and what we want to achieve when we set forth to improve on a system. We agree on this side of the House that we have to look at how we assess properties, have to look at how we tax municipally. We think it's an admirable goal to get a larger portion of the education bill off the property tax base. The question becomes how you do it.

We can't help but be concerned when we see the recommendations of your own government-appointed task force, the Crombie task force, not being adhered to. We get concerned when municipal officials and others in virtually every municipality in this province expressed their concerns about the net impact. Yes, we can debate that back and forth. We think the numbers are clear. The government has acknowledged at least $660 million in the first year and a one-time transfer to cover that, but what do we do after that?

1650

When you look at that context and when you look at what is going to happen, and supposedly this is all going to happen between now and next January and into the following year, we have very real concerns. Indeed I suspect many members opposite have many concerns about it.

It was interesting to note today, as we talk about property tax reform — how we assess, how we collect, who pays for what, who does what — to hear the Ontario Hospital Association saying on your restructuring: "Wait a minute, it's not working. You're not meeting your deadlines. We can't possibly do it." Even if you can support the concept of what's going on, you're left with the challenge of implementing it and how you do it.

We had a situation today in my home community where the heads of one of our local emergency wards both resigned, in their words, not mine, and these are not political people, "because of the chaos that's been created because we have not had the reinvestments in our health care system that we needed in order to accommodate the closure of two hospitals."

I say with respect to my colleagues opposite that when you consider these kinds of changes, when you look at them and when you think beyond the simple context of a broad question, you've got to think about implementation.

I found it interesting in this bill that the Minister of Finance in the province will now have additional power to set taxes by regulation in approximately 24 or 25 areas, I believe. As my colleague from Scarborough indicated, that's a remarkable power. The minister himself has acknowledged that. We now see a situation where the province of Ontario will be setting the mill rate on a substantial portion of property taxes that is faced by business or commercial property owners.

I want to take a minute to talk about the balance of taxation between income tax and property tax; what is appropriate to be paid off one tax versus another tax. That's how we tie back into the downloading issue.

Let's take, for example, social housing. We are looking at a situation where the province intends to download, not

only the administration but the financing of social housing. I must say to members opposite, I believe the administration of social housing can be done better locally and I support the general thrust of that.

In my own community, I had the opportunity for a number of years to sit on the board and chair the board of a group called the Windsor Housing Co, which provided geared-to-income, non-profit housing for senior citizens. I served on that board for about four or five years. Most people would concur that our local non-profit housing delivery units are, generally speaking, very good. The question becomes the dollars and cents and what tax base can afford to carry the cost.

There are some 84,000 Ontario Housing Corp units and another 150,000, 175,000 non-profit and co-op units in Ontario. The province is now submitting that the municipalities, municipality by municipality, should pick up the cost of that. The operating cost doesn't include the potentially high cost associated with redeveloping those properties and bringing them up to current standards.

We would agree that something has to be done. We would agree that we cannot allow the continuing deterioration of our public housing units. What we should be concentrating on is how you do it. What I would submit to the government is that you don't do that by putting the cost of social housing on to the property tax base.

The member for Scarborough-Agincourt spoke well about what happens when the economy goes down. In my community, we are subject to a very cyclical economy. Windsor's economy is tied largely to the auto industry, and we know in our community that we're the first ones out of a recession but we're also the first ones into it.

What happens when the economy goes down? I'll tell you what happens: The welfare caseloads go up, the number of property taxpaying citizens goes down, and those who are left are faced with an increasingly difficult burden. The municipality is put in a position of having to raise property taxes at precisely the time, from an economic perspective, that they shouldn't have to do it. Now as we put these additional costs on to the municipal property tax bill, it's going to be even more difficult.

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): Only one taxpayer.

Mr Duncan: Government members say there's only one taxpayer and we agree. That's why we don't understand why you insist on raising property taxes right across Ontario in spite of your promises to the contrary.

I will say this: In my municipality our senior municipal officials have said that they have looked at the numbers and that there is no way they can prevent property taxes from going up, none whatsoever, not unless the government changes dramatically its point of view with respect to downloading; not unless the government starts to listen, listening to people like Mr Crombie, listening to people like AMO, listening to people like your own colleagues, like Mr Skarica, who have spoken out with some courage and honesty.

Yes, there's room to debate these issues and there's room to say, "Can we rearrange services?" Governments have been trying to deal with this for a number of years, but when we move ahead with this kind of massive change and restructuring, we better think through the consequences. What comes through, we say, is that we don't believe the government has considered all the consequences.

Bill 149 provides the framework by which the Minister of Finance can implement the assessment reforms associated with Bill 106, but it doesn't specify what decisions will be made with these new powers. For example, the minister has the authority to define at which stage in the development process lands should pay higher taxes. However, the legislation doesn't specify when the higher rate should apply.

The government has not released any studies to show what impact the proposed changes will have on local property taxpayers. This is the largest change in our property tax system in 20 years, and you're asking property owners to accept the reforms blindfolded. If you have studies, why don't you release them? It's a simple thing to do. If you have a study that tells you what the impact is going to be, release the study. If you don't have the studies, I would submit that you're proceeding with too much haste and you're going to be left with an absolutely untenable situation when the full impact of these things is felt in a year or two's time.

Government ministers, like the minister of — what is it you do? I don't even remember — privatization, laugh. They laugh as they contemplate property tax increases. Why are they laughing? Because they've tried to set up a situation where they're going to be able to force these increases and try to blame it on municipalities; basically a dishonest public policy; basically an opportunity for the minister to sit there and say, "We haven't done this." Well, the people have caught on to you and they will have caught on well before the next general election; people like the mayors in your communities, people who will hold you accountable for these property tax increases that are contemplated in this bill.

This is the bill that will deal with everything from vacant land to charities occupying industrial or commercial lands to rights of way, and it affects everybody. We say that the government ought to take it back, and during the committee hearings we hope you're going to listen. We're glad the government is having committee hearings; as we said, we're not going to stall it, because you've already got yourselves into a time frame, a time dilemma in terms of implementation of all these changes.

We hope you'll listen to the mayors of virtually every major municipality in this province, who have told you unequivocally and documented their points of view. We hope you will listen to them. We hope you will understand that senior citizens on a fixed income can't afford property tax increases when they're trying to stay in their homes. There are many people like that in this province. We hope you'll consider that.

1700

We hope you'll think about the need to consider property tax reform: how you collect the taxes in light of what

you're doing with the assessments, your market value assessment project. We hope that you will keep in mind the whole range of things that can result from this.

I think again in my own community what will happen when we download ambulance services to municipalities, for instance, what happens when we download social housing. What is going to happen with education, especially now that you've cut so much money out of the education envelope? Yes, property tax reform is important, but the government in our view has just proceeded too quickly, far too quickly.

What really concerns us, concerns me as a former municipal politician, is the deceptive way in which these municipalities are going to have to make tough decisions that you forced on them so that you could proceed with your tax cut and attempt to balance your budget. We think there is going to be a real mess to clean up in a year and a half. In fact, it will take a long time to clean it up. You're ramming through this legislation without giving anybody a clear picture of where it is going.

Mr Phillips: "No impact studies."

Mr Duncan: No impact studies. The minister said, "No impact studies"; he acknowledged that today. The minister is telling us they're going through the entire property tax system in this province —

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister without Portfolio [Privatization]): What are you talking about?

Mr Duncan: Where are they? Produce them. Show us. What is the impact of Bill 106 and this bill going to be on my community? How many property taxpayers in Mississauga or Windsor or wherever are going to have a property tax increase? I submit, most of them will. You will attempt to hide it, you will attempt to blame everyone else, but unfortunately the people have caught on to you. They know what you're doing. You're cutting taxes for your friends so they can pay higher property taxes.

What's most astounding, and the government hasn't figured it out yet, is that this is going to affect small business. Who pays property taxes in our communities, whether it's Windsor, whether it's London, whether it's Mississauga, Etobicoke? It's small business, commercial.

Mr Phillips: That's what the CFIB said. Remember that.

Mr Duncan: Yes. That's what the CFIB said. This is the CFIB, signed by Judith Andrew:

"Ironically, it is likely that the elimination of the business occupancy tax will harm our sector. Smaller firms are concerned at the low end of the 25% to 75% tax range of this archaic tax. If municipalities opt to recoup the amount on the business tax base, an average 40% rate would see most small businesses paying more."

That contradicts what the minister says. The minister says they won't be. Everyone else says they will be. The government's credibility when they say much of anything is wearing thin at best.

Let's talk about the promises. I'm quoting from a campaign document for Isabel Bassett, which says, "The policy of the PC Party has always been that we will never" — and the emphasis is in the brochure — "impose market value assessment on Toronto. We remain firm in that position."

What is actual value assessment? It's market value assessment. Another game. Wording: "We say it's not, it's not, but we all know it is." You got away with that for a while. You got away with it in the last election.

Mr Ed Doyle (Wentworth East): We didn't —

Mr Duncan: You sure did. People were hungry for that.

What are we getting now? We're getting closed hospitals. We've got thousands of students and teachers marching on the steps of the Legislature just today because they figured you out. You said you wouldn't cut classroom education, but "heat shouldn't be part of the cost of classroom education." Shouldn't be? Well, people are catching on, just as the courts caught on last week on Bill 26. The hospital association is starting to catch on, with hospital closures. "We won't close a single hospital." I don't know what the count is now, but it is going up every day and we expect more.

Anything like the Common Sense Revolution that is premised on falsehoods, that is premised on promises that can't be kept will eventually collapse. We're seeing that. We're seeing that in virtually every major realm of public policy. It will be interesting to watch as this province is completely reassessed in the coming weeks and months. It will be interesting to watch what happens.

I had an opportunity to speak to our mayor, who is very concerned that the reassessment will increase taxes still more, over and above what is being contemplated in the downloading. As always, I like to check not just what happens in our community but what happens across the province. We're hearing that from every municipality. I've seen the documents from Windsor, from Ottawa, from Toronto, from London. All of them are saying the same thing.

The government is operating under tight time frames. It is changing our property tax system, changing the way we govern ourselves municipally at such a pace that we are concerned about the eventual consequences and outcomes. We believe that taken together, this government's policies shift the tax burden from income tax to the property tax base. We believe that property taxpayers are the ones who are going to pay and finance your tax cut. What does that mean? That means we're using a less fair system of taxation to bear a greater share of the public services we all value, moreover, to pay for your promises which thoughtful people all agreed couldn't possibly be kept in the context in which they were stated.

We look forward to the public hearings. We look forward to hearing from municipalities, from the business community, from others who have an interest in this and who have an interest in making sure their property taxes don't go through the roof to pay for the promises that you now know you can't keep. You didn't talk about those property tax increases in your election document. You didn't say that to anybody. They're going to happen, and people will know who is responsible.

We look forward to those hearings, but more important, we look forward to debating these issues in our towns and in our communities when people start to get their tax bill next year, when senior citizens whose income isn't going up as much get large property tax increases. We look forward to that debate. We look forward to holding you accountable for what you're doing not only in terms of trying to address problems we all acknowledge are there but in terms of what you're doing and how you're doing it.

It's our view, the view of the official opposition, that you've chosen to penalize property taxpayers, that you've chosen to penalize municipalities. Yes, the government members are right: There is only one taxpayer. The income taxpayer is the same as the property taxpayer and the same as the person who pays user fees. We intend to work with those property taxpayers and those people who are paying user fees to say no to your tomfoolery and restore a sense of order and decency to this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Questions or comments?

Mr Wildman: I wanted to congratulate my friends the members for Scarborough-Agincourt and Windsor-Walkerville on their presentations with regard to Bill 149. I thought the member for Scarborough-Agincourt was quite clear in the fact that he believes this bill that is being proposed will compound the mess we are going to see beginning in January 1998 as a result of this government's download of so many costs to municipalities because it is being done so quickly, the reassessment is being done in many cases by untrained individuals who may not have the expertise that is required to ensure that the assessments are done properly and that we will see enormous property tax increases at the municipal level because of what this government is doing. I think it's going to be quite a surprise to the one taxpayer we have, as the member for Windsor-Walkerville indicated. The fact is, they may get a few dollars in an income tax break — not very much, but they may get a few — but they are going to see an enormous increase in the taxes on their properties and businesses at the municipal level which will far outweigh what they may save in income taxes. That is going to hurt them certainly, and politically it's going to hurt the government.

I also want to say that I'm very unhappy about the fact that this government has moved to begin taxing off-reserve lands held by first nations without any consultation with first nations people. I don't understand how this government can do this. It's a complete denial of their aboriginal and treaty rights.

1710

Ms Bassett: I want to comment on the remarks made by the members for Scarborough-Agincourt, Algoma and Windsor-Walkerville. I thank you for your comments.

I want to point out that this bill does not give the Minister of Finance undue regulatory power. He has the authority to set tax rates on rights of way, and the other regulations set only the parameters for municipalities to set their own tax rates. This is a very important distinction to make, and these changes are an important step in reducing the duplication and overlap between the province and municipalities.

On the second issue, I want to point out that Bill 149 will assess railway and hydro property lines in nine geographic areas. That is one of the amendments that the member must have missed. The amendment adds a new subsection to section 368.3 of the Municipal Act, creating nine geographic areas in which tax rates for railway and hydro will be set. Therefore, a hydro or railway property in downtown Toronto will not be assessed in the same way as a property in Simcoe. That's another important distinction.

Last, I want to point out that municipalities will be able to create three bands of assessed values and have three rates to meet their local needs. Therefore, the removal of the BOT, which is an outdated tax instituted in 1902 which all three parties have said must be done away with, will not jeopardize small business. It will be up to the municipalities to deal with that, and they now have new powers in order to do that.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I too want to congratulate my colleagues from Scarborough-Agincourt and Windsor-Walkerville on their comments today. I think an important part of what they had to say was to give the taxpayers of Ontario a warning. The warning is this: There are impact studies that exist — if there aren't, this government should be ashamed for not having them done — but they aren't released. Why aren't they released? What are you hiding? When my community went to market value assessment, the very first thing we did was have an impact study so we could understand just what effect it would have on the community.

A warning: In this and accompanying legislation, the business occupancy tax is folded into the general tax; the warning is that the residential taxpayer is going to have to pay more.

A warning: Gross receipts are being transferred to the province, some $90 million that the province is taking out of municipalities and not giving anything back; the warning is that property taxpayers in municipalities are going to pay for that.

A warning: They have said that seniors and the disabled could have their taxes deferred, and that's good for them in the meantime, but the municipality has to have that money. They have to get it somewhere: from the other property taxpayers in the municipality. Of course the estate — and the seniors and the disabled and their relatives should know this — is then going to have to pay it later on.

A warning: The civil servants in the assessment department have said that this can't be done, you can't do it in the time line that's been set. When new councils sit down next year and don't have the assessment rolls because they aren't ready, they won't be able to set their budgets and it'll be utter chaos.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I want to speak to the issue of the business occupancy tax, because the response the member for Windsor-Walkerville got from the parliamentary assistant about the provincial govern-

ment moving to remove the business occupancy tax was quite interesting. We know what that means. We're saying as an opposition party, as New Democrats, that if the government does that and gets municipalities to remove the BOT, what'll end up happening is that the money saved on the BOT will be automatically reassessed back on the property taxes of either the businesses or the overall community. The citizens of that community will keep on paying.

What was interesting was that the comment of the parliamentary assistant was, "If the BOT is removed, we're going to leave it up to the municipalities to figure out how they're going to deal with that, so we shouldn't worry." I think we should worry, not because I don't trust municipalities but because the downloading municipalities are receiving from the provincial government is going to put municipal councils of this province in the worst possible position they can be in.

They're losing transfers from the province big time; they're losing revenues in regard to the BOT and other taxes around agricultural land big time; they're having to pick up provincial services being passed to the municipality, everything from ambulance services all the way through education. What ends up happening is that councils are going to be strapped to try to find cash to pay for services. So what do you think they're going to do? Municipal councils are saying already that they're going to have to raise both business taxes and residential property taxes in communities like Iroquois Falls, Kenora, Sudbury, Hamilton and other places, by as much as 50%.

The property taxpayers that you talk about as the one taxpayer are going to remember that, because it means you will virtually be forcing people out of their homes due to property tax increases the likes of which we have never seen before in the province.

The Acting Speaker: Who's going to do the wrapup?

Mr Phillips: I appreciate the comments from the members for Cochrane South, Algoma and Essex South and the parliamentary assistant. I just want to address two or three comments.

The parliamentary assistant helped make my point for me, that is, that I said the bill will now tax an acre of railway land at Yonge Street and the Gardiner Expressway exactly as an acre of land up on Lake Simcoe. The parliamentary assistant is shaking her head, but that's what the bill does. It has nine geographic regions, and one of them is city of Toronto all the way up to Lake Simcoe. That makes my point for me.

Second, the business occupancy tax: The small business community is saying, "Listen, this thing could hurt us badly." Today we still don't have the solution. What is the government planning to do here? No idea — nothing there. My colleague from Essex South I thought expressed it very well, the warnings to Ontario. We now have enough experience with Mike Harris's government that it introduces things without having thought them through to anywhere near the extent that was necessary.

My colleague from Essex South points out chaos in the assessment system, because it was started late and done, we gather, badly. Here we are less than three months from the start of the year, and how are we doing to deal with different levels of commercial assessment, the rights of way, with seemingly illogical recommendations on them?

The government simply says, "Change is needed and we're doing it." I think the public wants change, but change done right. This doesn't look like it's change done right.

1720

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

M. Pouliot : Je prends plaisir à pencher quelques mots au sujet du projet de loi 149. What a mess we're in. With high respect, it didn't have to be this way. With your help, Madame, we'll do it together.

Picture this: In three months' time, on January 1, 1998, coming in your municipality, in your neighbourhood, social housing costs; three months from now, a larger portion of general assistance for the marginalized, brothers and sisters who need a helpful hand. You will pay the cost at the municipal level out of your property taxes. Coming to the same neighbourhood: charities, the elderly, all those of our citizens who need a helping hand.

This is not revenue-neutral. This is not a wash. No government in a western democracy, if it were revenue-neutral, would risk this endeavour. This is very massive. What we're talking about here is 3.8 million units being reassessed or assessed: the largest endeavour, the largest undertaking, in the context of property value ever in North America.

The civil service, those fine women and men who make their daily living monitoring, are saying to expect 600,000 appeals. What a backlog: 600,000 out of 3.8 million. So on January 1, 1998, municipalities shall take on those new responsibilities at a collective cost of approximately $1.2 billion. On the other hand, they will lose $1.6 billion in assessed business occupancy tax. The farm tax rebate will add another $170 million, and so on and so on.

We begin to understand when we look for the substance of the bill, which is to give the opportunity to municipalities to establish subclasses of taxes. If it were revenue-neutral, would they be given that latitude? If this were a wash, would the government, in their proverbial generosity, turn to the municipality and say: "We give you the tools. Be innovative, be imaginative, and you will have the opportunity through flexibility to go and collect left and right"? Well, it ain't so. This is a shortfall of a magnitude never imagined.

The government has the audacity three months before to either sit on or hide impact reports, studies. Where are they?

As you know, Madam, I live in a small village, a small community. Ours is a mere 3,400 people, 850 miles north of Toronto. You know about the great riding of Lake Nipigon. We extend to Hudson Bay. We're 1,000 miles long. The people who live in our communities in Lake Nipigon listen to the Premier. You have to believe someone at some time. In the comfort and privacy of their homes, they sometimes watch question period, sometimes they choose to watch the debate, and they look carefully at

the Premier of the province. When he says, "Your taxes should go down anywhere from 5% to 10% in the next three years," our good friends in Manitouwadge and elsewhere are saying, "I believe you, Mr Harris."

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: My apologies to the member for Lake Nipigon. He is a brilliant and compelling speaker. There should be a quorum here to listen to him.

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum?

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Lake Nipigon.

Mr Pouliot: I wish to thank the member for Welland-Thorold for reminding government members that it is their duty to have enough people in the House. I know that from time to time on a Thursday afternoon at approximately 5:30 you must compete, if you're a government member, with the likes of the Toronto Club and the Albany Club. I apologize to people at the club that they have to come back into the House to serve the people who pay the freight for all this.

Three months from now, some people's worlds are about to severely impacted. Before the quorum call, I was speaking of Mike Harris's credibility when he say taxes will go down. Taxes will not go down in Manitouwadge. Social housing costs will be added, and the cost for the Ontario Provincial Police alone will add $400 to $500 per house. It will hit the pockets of the taxpayers.

It's nothing short of a sham. If we were outside and I heard it said, this is a great untruth, and why is it so? Because the government in the last election campaign, when they were soliciting, asking people to put their X in the right place, promised a 30% tax cut on the provincial income tax. That 30% reduction adds up to $5 billion per year after the final instalment. Plus, they said: "While we're on the hook, we might as well promise the world. We will balance the budget in the first term."

So they were talking in terms of $14 billion to $15 billion. You have to make up the shortfall. Let's face it, if you don't cap it, if you give a full 30% rebate on the provincial income tax, the more money you make, the more you shall pocket. There's no question about that. Frank Stronach and M^{me} Bassett will do very fine, thank you. Thirty-eight million last year at Magna International and I want to wish him well — no envy, no jealousy. But I have some elders living in the northern reserves who have to subsist, have to make a living on less than $10,000 per year. Many of our senior citizens experience the same dire needs, and the government talks to me about fairness? I don't mind if the rich get a tax break, because of course they pay a lot of taxes, but what I really mind is that they are given the opportunity to run so much faster: faster than the middle class, faster than the small-wage earner, faster than the marginalized and those who have less. I really believe that it is unfair, that it has to stop someplace. Don't take the money away, of course not, but restore some equilibrium, some balance. It makes no sense at all.

1730

But in order to accomplish your agenda, you must move the world. Never in the annals of the province has an undertaking of such magnitude taken place. Three months before, people are frightened — well, they're anxious, and when you are anxious, sometimes it leads to fear. Rumours take on extraordinary proportions. You don't know what the cost will be, but you know that on January 1, you will be asked by your local council to come up with 50% of the previous year's levy. You pay taxes for general purpose; you pay taxes under your school levy. They'll go to a full 50%.

Then the assessment will start hitting. The notices will start hitting around late March or April. You'll already be three months into their fiscal year. Keep in mind that our fiscal year starts on April 1, so there is a discrepancy of three months, plus the great world of the unknown. Then citizens, residents, homeowners, small business, industry will be getting the final tax levy. How much will it be? Nobody knows. But Mike Harris says if they really tighten their belt, they — not "I," but they — should be able to cut taxes.

I'll give you an example. In some of the small farming communities — they abound in Ontario; it's vast, magnificent, very productive indeed — the municipality, the small village, takes 75% or in some cases 80% of its tax revenue from the farm rebate. Now Mike Harris says that money will no longer go to the municipality, but if they tighten their belt, they should be able to enact savings of anywhere from 5% to 10%.

It cannot be done, because they have already been for many years now under a self-imposed austerity program. They are quite lean. They are not about to sell the grader, for as surely as the river flows, there will be winter. They need the grader, one grader operator. Mike Harris says: "No, no. Cut off the grader. You don't need it." That's what he says, because he pockets the money.

Interjections.

Mr Pouliot: Madame, when I say he pockets the money, I want to make a correction: on behalf of the government. He will have to carry the guilt. The money goes into that vat, the general fund, goes into the vortex, and then the accomplices — I mean the Minister of Finance and the Premier — get together and dole it out to each ministry.

In this case it will matter less who governs you, when all is said and done. It will matter where you live. This will be the common denominator. Talk about location, location, location. The local entity will be given the responsibilities without the money, and that is traumatic. No one is saying: "What about recourse? If there's a shortfall, what am I to do? Am I to increase taxes by $500 per year per unit so that two of our seniors, Ms Jones and Mr Smith, are out the door?" Well, you can't do that. They don't have the ability to pay.

You know what I've heard at committee? Two prominent members of the Progressive Conservatives in response to this potential tragedy in shelter, a place you call home. "If you cannot afford to live there, sell it," was

one comment. Another comment was, "Have you ever heard of a reverse mortgage?" Devastating. If this is not being provocative, it tells a sad story about our friends opposite. I can understand that philosophically they can be somewhat to the right, but with that lack of compassion and truly understanding, it doesn't augur well for Smith and Jones. I try to remind them that we're all on a waiting list of sorts, but most of them are more fortunate than my friends the citizens Jones and Smith. I guess you don't share.

Who gets the breaks? Winners and losers. Think about it. Newton's third law: For every move in one direction, there is one of equal proportion in the other direction. The banks, because of the business occupancy tax, get a big break. The car plants get a tremendous break; they go from 75% to 42% on the formula.

Who's going to pick it up? If you're commercially assessed, you will pick it up, because you get no break on schools. You will still pay the full complement of your school responsibilities. Then the council will have to decide, in their wisdom, because there is a shortfall big time: Do we hit the homeowners or do we hit the Canadian Tire store? I don't wish to impute motive, but there are 500 houses and there are 30 businesses. Some people will wish to count it that way, and they will show no mercy. They will take no prisoners. They need the money.

The government says the municipality will be given a reprieve. They will be given eight years to implement tax changes. They don't have to do it overnight. If you dislocate because your new assessment is forever impacting, extraordinary — the municipality, you can talk with them. But the municipality has to talk to the banker. At the end of the first year, many will be so far in the hole, they will have a hard choice to make. One of the choices will be to give the keys to the town office: "Here, have it, Mike Harris. I'm under receivership. I'm under receivership, Mikey. You come and run the town." Or they have to pay the banker, and if they have to pay the banker, there's interest, les coûts de manutention. It costs money, so you raise taxes in order to make ends meet.

A sad legacy indeed. Where are the impact studies? Where are they? How will we be impacted in three months' time, not five years down the line? You're reassessing 3.8 million units. You know the way it works. You're spending tens of millions of dollars. You hire those contractors who do assessments. They hire university and high school students, 30 bucks a shot. They put them on a quota and give them 12 bucks an hour. And the contractor — that's okay, the free enterprise system — pockets the difference.

The thing is, they've never done it before. Some of them are afraid of large dogs when they go to assess, because they don't have good news written all over them. As they enter the driveway, they're afraid of large dogs outside and large dogs inside, and they're there with their little notebook, their little "calepin," to see how many square feet and so on, and people know that a few months down the line, many of them will have very difficult decisions to make because their municipal taxes, the most relevant form of government, will come calling. Municipal taxes are the most impacting because you write the cheque. It's very much live, live, live; you pay, pay, pay. It's not taken off at the source. You write the cheque twice a year and it's painful, and people will notice. When they notice, when they put the pay stub on the table — it's sort of a family affair — the family gathers and they say: "Jane and Harry, this is how much we're spending. That's what we have. That's our lot. We get paid every two weeks."

1740

When they see that the municipal bill has gone up they will remember. Passion, vengeance: Get used to them. They will remember vividly specifically what Mike Harris and his brigade, all of you, said and they will say, "My taxes are going up," and you will say, "It's because you have been reassessed," and they will say, "It is because some other people are getting a break."

Many people who get a break will say: "What about retro? I had it coming. What took you so long?" People who don't get a break will say: "You shied away from the truth. You sold snake oil. You were conjurers of illusion." You played cheap magic because you wanted their vote, and you got their vote and you failed to deliver.

One more example of the Common Sense Revolution; it doesn't seem to stop — one would have thought that by this time some of the grey eminence, some of the spin doctors in the Premier's office or down on Bay Street would say they are overestimating the capacity of people to assimilate, to digest changes. We all welcome changes. People are saying, "You put the brakes on, let us be, because if you don't do it, it will be at your own peril and you will pay the political price."

Much more important, in a revolution people get hurt, there are victims, it is inevitable, but you have to show some sensitivity. You have to always seek balance, equilibrium, not the extreme left or the extreme right. You are embarked on a voyage that would make the best Anglican reverend or father proud on a Sunday morning as he delivers an address. You're giving him all the material to show his parishioners what is wrong in society and you represent that.

Many of you are not systematic, but it makes no sense not to know three months before the skies are about to be very low. Three months before, you don't know where you're going. What will it cost? Give us the cost factor. Three months — the train is coming in. Where is it? I have the right as a citizen, as a homeowner, to ask for a feasibility study. How will I be impacted? I'm going to start preparing so I can afford to pay my municipal tax bill. I don't want to be left short at all.

Interjections.

Mr Pouliot: They make light, they mock, it's their role if you're not quite like them, and yet I know it's difficult for ministers from the back seat of a stretch limousine to say, "Okay, stop it here, this is a democratic area, a populist area where average people live, so I'm going to go there." For many of them you don't have to go too far. Just

look at their hands; they'll tell the tale. Many of them have Gucci shoes. The unfortunate part is that they don't have Gucci feet. That's the most unfortunate part, but they parade themselves.

I want to get your attention, with high respect, and the attention of the parliamentary assistant to finance, that of Isabel Bassett, the member for St Andrew-St Patrick. She was instrumental, singlehandedly. I was there. You had to be there to appreciate it. When people came calling, democratic theatre, street theatre, the arts, the beauty of the soul, they came calling with their needs, and I see in the proposal, Bill 149, that those concerns have been addressed. On their behalf, thank you very kindly. It's quite a departure from the Phantom and for those who have more to really relate to the contribution they make, and they could be exempt from taxes, although it's not guaranteed yet; there's still some work to be done. This is the one part of the bill that I agree with. The rest of it, and I've searched long and hard for ways to acquiesce, to be positive and to say, "This is a good document" — most unfortunately I was unable to find any other parts of the bill that I could agree with. It's most unfortunate.

The rights of way: You know about CNR, Canadian National, Canadian Pacific. You know about Ontario Hydro. Under the provisions of Bill 149, they've just won the lottery. Since Confederation they were given huge tracts of land. They did very well indeed. Over the years, as things changed, we had just-in-time delivery, truck traffic more than doubled in the past six years, alternatives were sought, door-to-door delivery, and they fell from favour. So they took the good breaks they had before, sold some properties, moved to the States and now they're competing with themselves. At one time, CP had the largest truck company in Canada. They were competing with the railroad; well, it wasn't called CP Rail.

You begin to understand the leaning, the tendencies of you, Ernie Eves, and you, Mike Harris, and I've been watching you carefully. Both of you, with respect, deserve to be chastised. When we confront you, you start shuffling paper and you start talking to one another. I wish the cameras had the ability to pan and see what's happening around here, but I understand that the protocol does not allow them to focus on individual members.

Rights of way will be exempt. The rich get richer.

Ontario Hydro — I'm just going through the book — this is what is happening here with Ontario Hydro. Do you know what the debt is? The debt of Ontario Hydro is about $32 billion. That's what the government says, that it's $29 billion plus another $3 billion. But what they don't tell you is that Ontario Hydro is about to embark on a debenture issue, bond issues, to the tune of $8 billion to $10 billion in the next four years. It will swell their debt to more than $40 billion. In fact, the Macdonald commission — Speaker, I want to share this with you — says, "If you wish to privatize Ontario Hydro, reduce your debt to $15 billion so it will become more manageable."

1750

Aside from Ontario Hydro, let's go back to the provincial debt, the one that keeps increasing every day because this government each and every day borrows more money than it takes in. Every hour this government spends $500 more than it takes in. Unbelievable. Day after day after day, 15% of the money that is spent through taxes, through revenues, is to pay the plastic, the provincial debt. And what do they do? They go on another bender. They say: "Raise the limit on my credit card. I will cut taxes. I'm not going to pay my debt; I'm going to throw a party."

I would pay my debt first. It makes more sense to me. People tell you, "If you win something, pay your credit cards, pay down your mortgage," but not those wizards, oh, no, not those power brokers. What do you do? You get in debt even more. "If we're in debt, there's no reason why you at the municipal level, why you the small homeowner, why you the citizen can't join us."

Mr Kormos: "Come along for the ride."

Mr Pouliot: "Come along for the ride and be in debt."

Savings are at an all-time low in percentage. Ontarians don't save nearly as much as they used to. Personal debt is very, very high. Personal bankruptcies are at an all-time high. People give up and turn away the keys.

When I look at the generation that is growing up and the high degree of unemployment among our young, educated people, it is very painful.

They don't seem to put in the incentives. Oh, they talk a good line, they're smooth, but when it's time to walk the walk, they disappear.

I recall when I was raised many years ago in Montréal, we didn't have much in the neighbourhood but we had so much to look forward to. Today I go right here in downtown Toronto, and the young people seem to have a little more but I wonder if they have as much to look forward to as I had. Those are the people who will be the leaders in the society of tomorrow. They are eager to share, looking forward to the adventure, but you're not going to do it by cutting $1 billion from 1996 to 1997 in education. You acquire the tools to defend yourself, to integrate economically in society. Without education you don't have much of a chance.

When the government says, "We're not cutting," oh, yes, you're cutting. When the government says, "We're not cutting health care," because again you've got to find the tax cut somewhere, of course you're cutting health care. You can say that you're spending the same money, but there are 700,000 more people than there were four and a half years ago in Ontario, so per capita you're sure cutting.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): You guys stopped the growth. Frances Lankin stopped the growth in the health budget. She put a cap on it, the first minister who was able to do that, actually. There was 11% growth and she brought it down to 1%.

Mr Pouliot: "You guys this" and "You guys that." You can blame the past government, but the fact is, Minister, you have been the government since June 8, 1995. Madam, you take the credit, you take the blame.

You've had a recovery. Our export markets have been doing so well, you could have done otherwise. You had

some choices to make. You have chosen to increase the debt. The debt will be fully $20 million more when you finally leave office — none too soon, I might add. The people out there are asking: "Will people cross the floor? Will they come and sit beside us?"

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): That looks better.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Not only is that out of order, it could be construed as assault.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I agree. Member for Lake Nipigon.

Mr Pouliot: This is an extraordinary departure from form. I would ask that Your High Tenure do address — at first I thought it could have possibly been an act of aggression, but I will conclude this sorry episode by saying that I'm a little hurt and somewhat vexed. It interrupted my flow, but more importantly —

The Speaker: Excuse me, member for Lake Nipigon, did you say vexed?

Mr Pouliot: Vexed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Pouliot: Mr Speaker, thank you for your help. I make the same mistake in three languages, and I'm comfortable in another two, but I do appreciate your help, sir.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): What's the third language?

Mr Pouliot: [Remarks in Spanish]

I want to talk to you, Mr Speaker, while we have five minutes left. I wish to focus on the need to get back on track. Here you have a government that is cutting taxes to the tune of 30%, mostly for the rich. If you're at the bottom end of the pecking order, you hardly get a cup of coffee from the tax cut. If you make $25,000 per year, you pocket $450. Someone who makes 10 times that pockets 30 times the $450: $15,000. Does it make any sense? They call that a progression, yet the debt every hour of every day keeps growing and growing; $247,000 yields you $15,000 at la payola, but if you make $25,000, you get $450. And I'm supposed to believe in you? I'm supposed to go to your altar and respect your manifesto and your mantra. Like heck, if I may be so bold.

They couldn't manage a candy floss shop or a shop of any sort. If I had a few dollars to invest, they would be the last people in the world I would entrust my money with. Would you? Mind you, I would buy their bonds because they pay more, because they will not be competitive for that long. They can improve their credit rating in times of prosperity, but when the cycle hits, when they run out of demographic options in 2006, 2007, will the new government, when we're back, have enough time to rectify the legacy? The party of gloom and doom. You would have thought the Conservatives deserved better. People, we're reminding them, will say: "They overnighted. They stayed one term and they left a very sad legacy. In a time where all around us prosperity was becoming more visible, they chose to augment and to increase the debt."

January 1, 1998, stay tuned, be at your post, be the fine soldier, the sentry, be vigilant, because the bills will start rolling in and they will not give you the shortfall. They will not send you a cheque to make up the difference because the cheque will have gone to Bay Street.

It being 6 of the clock, Mr Speaker —

The Speaker: The member for Mississauga West would like to read the business for next week.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister without Portfolio [Privatization]): I have the weekly business statement. Pursuant to standing order 55, I wish to indicate the business of the House for the week of September 29, 1997.

Monday, September 29: Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act; Bill 149, Fair Municipal Finance Act (No. 2).

Tuesday, September 30: Bill 149, Fair Municipal Finance Act (No. 2); Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act.

Wednesday, October 1: Opposition day, Liberals; Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act.

Thursday, October 2: Private members' public business, ballot items 101 and 102; Bill 149, Fair Municipal Finance Act (No. 2).

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Before we adjourn, I know that all members would like to know that the member for Durham Centre's mother and wife are in the members' gallery. Welcome.

It now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock Monday.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Honourable Chris Stockwell

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 septembre 1997

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): For over a year, Mike Harris has been moving at breakneck speed to close hospitals in Ontario. My colleagues and I have been trying to make the government listen, really listen, to the people they serve; listen and slow down. Recently the OHA released a study conducted by the University of Western Ontario. The study confirms what we have been saying all along, that the speed of restructuring is directly affecting patient care. It means less nursing time per patient, reduced patient supervision, high employee stress and a reduced level of cleanliness. In other words, the government's too hasty agenda is undermining the quality of health care in Ontario.

In my own community, to quote the CEO of the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, "The amount of change is overwhelming...less time with patients is a reality here." The president of the Kent County Medical Society believes the cutbacks have already adversely affected patient care. He says, "The government hasn't come through with the financial commitments it said it was going to make."

On behalf of all the residents of Chatham-Kent who are already experiencing serious medical underservicing, I urge the government to slow down. Be certain the changes you impose guarantee quality health care for every single resident of Chatham-Kent. The government should only use speed in providing the money required to support our hospitals and community-based patient care.

NORTH BAY DAYS OF ACTION

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): The North Bay Days of Action are technically over, but the spirit and energy lives on. As organizers projected, Saturday saw the largest demonstration ever in northern Ontario. Over 30,000 protesters filled the streets of North Bay in an orderly and peaceful but unmistakable denouncement of the Harris government's policies and their negative effect on working people.

I met teachers, child care workers, custodians, clerks, psychiatric nurses, garbage collectors, community workers, correctional officers, property assessors, professors, government inspectors, students, people from all walks of life joining together to send a message to Mike Harris.

"We won't back down" was the rallying cry of the day, as speaker after speaker spoke about preserving community services, health care and the quality of education. "Fish or cut bait" was the repeated challenge to Premier Harris, in recognition of the fact that he chose to ignore the people in his own home town and instead went fishing with the governor of Iowa.

As one local resident said in response to the question, what did they think of this event taking place in Mike's town, "It's not Mike's town, it's our town." In a similar vein, others added their voices, "It's not Mike's Ontario, it's our Ontario and we're taking it back."

I want to pay special tribute to the team of ordinary working people who planned, organized and marshalled the Days of Action events. They are a true tribute to the skill, ingenuity and energy of the working people of Ontario.

MUSKOKA-GEORGIAN BAY ECONOMY

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): Small businesses are the economic strength of this province and when they are booming, so is the province. It's my pleasure to inform the Legislative Assembly what the small business owners in my riding of Muskoka-Georgian Bay are saying.

Sue Paul, the manager of Northern Reflections in Midland, said, "We've been extremely busy over last year, an incredible increase." "This year there's a lot more tourists, a lot more cottagers, a lot more travellers. We're seeing more from Europe, England and a lot of Americans. We're just running off our feet."

In Bracebridge, Inn at the Falls owner Peter Rickard said of 1997, "This is the best season we've had since we owned the business."

At The Panhandler in Midland, owner Sharlene Bullock says: "This summer has been very strong. I'm having to bump up orders that I thought were sufficient but now realize are not." She said that a noticeable increase in traffic began last Christmas season and it hasn't stopped since. During that time she found that customers were interested in more expensive purchases.

In Gravenhurst, Russ Brown of the steamboat RMS Segwun had a record-breaking summer. "As of the end of August, we had all record months. We're very pleased."

Muskoka Tourism marketing manager Randy Clark said 1997 was a great year for business and he expects the remainder of the year to be busy in anticipation of the upcoming Bala cranberry festival and the fall colours tour.

The chair of the Midland Business Improvement Area said, "There have been a lot more people downtown and more activity on the main street."

I was very pleased to hear these comments from the business owners in my riding. As they benefit from an expanding economy, so do all Ontarians.

SABIN CAUTIS

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I rise today concerned that this government does not acknowledge the achievements of the Ontario educational system. It was only last week that the Minister of Education called Ontario "the caboose at the end of the education train." I hope the minister will take some time and learn about the successes of our system before he condemns it, by his irresponsible and reckless actions, to mediocrity.

Let me tell my fellow members about the achievements of a student from my community, Sabin Cautis of Earl Haig Secondary School in North York. Sabin is a member of the 1997 Canadian International Mathematics Olympiad team. Sabin was selected from among more than 200,000 students who participated in local, provincial and national mathematics competitions and has been on the Canadian team for the past two years.

The Canadian team of six high school students won two silver medals, two bronze, and an honourable mention at the 38th International Mathematics Olympiad. The Canadian team placed 29th out of 82 competing countries. Since 1981, Canadian students have achieved a total of eight gold, 21 silver and 39 bronze medals.

Obviously, the achievements of Sabin Cautis and many other students in Ontario are a reflection of the good that can come out of the province's educational institutions.

TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): On Saturday I had the opportunity to participate in Toronto's annual Take Back the Night march. This year, the festivities took place in my riding of Riverdale at the Jimmy Simpson Recreation Centre. Inside, there were displays and information tables to let women know about resources and programs available around Metro. Outside, in the park, we were treated to the music of local female singers and inspiring speeches by women directly involved in the fight against violence against women.

By about 8:30, the crowd had grown to about 600, and it was an enthusiastic, noisy group of women who took to the streets to proclaim our right to be free of violence and to walk in our own streets without fear.

Ironically, this year's event coincided with the Solicitor General's release of the news that they will fund 17 shelters and agencies this year; that is to say, 17 of 261 applications from organizations working to prevent violence and to help deal with the devastating effects of violence against women. This is happening on top of cuts to welfare, legal aid, day care, social housing, second-stage housing and rape crisis centres, and the gutting of rent control. And the list goes on.

This government's war against women must stop. I want to congratulate all of those who organized this year's Take Back the Night event and all those working in the trenches to help end violence against women.

EDNA DAVENPORT DONATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): As a graduate of the University of Toronto, it is indeed a pleasure that I rise to inform the House that the U of T has received one of the largest cash gifts in its history, $9.7 million from a former household science student. The donation, from 90-year-old Edna Davenport in the estate of her late husband, John, was announced by the widow's son, Peter, at a dinner honouring six Nobel laureates last night.

Edna, originally from Owen Sound and now living in Florida, was wooed by her late husband, a chemical engineering student from Hamilton, during her flapper years at the University of Toronto. They wed in 1932 on campus in the Hart House chapel. The widow's son, Peter, said his parents wanted to do something special to thank the institution that meant so much to them.

The donation will be used to build a state-of-the-art laboratory on top of the school's aging chemistry building. It will pay for a three-floor expansion of the current building as well as the necessary new lab upgrades.

University of Toronto president Robert Prichard called the donation a "breathtakingly generous gesture." The University of Toronto describes the Davenport donation as a "spectacular act of generosity." This is extremely significant to the university and Canada, because it is the kind of philanthropy that will some day produce future Nobel laureates like John Polanyi, who was the laureate in chemistry in 1986. I am sure all of us will join in thanking the Davenport family for their generous gift. We all wish the University of Toronto success —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

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PEOPLE FIRST

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On Saturday afternoon in Welland I attended a public forum sponsored by the People First organization where individuals with disabilities gathered to share with everyone in attendance their needs and their hopes and aspirations. It is unfortunate that all members of the Ontario Legislature were not able to hear what the member for Welland-Thorold and I were able to listen to, as the experiences of these individuals with disabilities were most revealing.

The apprehension felt by everyone about the changes being contemplated in Bill 142 was apparent in virtually all the presentations. What each one of these people was seeking was an assurance that an adequate support system would be in place to assist them in being as independent as possible despite their disabilities. To have some of their needs met requires an investment by the government of Ontario, an investment in people.

The People First forum was not a gathering of the rich and the privileged in some posh, private club. They were not people who by virtue of a powerful position and an accumulation of wealth are able to live comfortably without the financial intervention of government. They are, rather, people who need the understanding and help of elected representatives to give them an opportunity to cope with and overcome obstacles presented by their various disabilities.

They live in fear that in an attempt to cater to those who want to randomly slash social expenditures and take advantage of an income tax cut that favours the richest in our province the most, their support systems will be eroded or removed. Let all of us work to allay their fears to ensure that the people with disabilities are not treated as second-class citizens.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): It's my pleasure to rise today and advise the House that I was also one of those in North Bay this weekend. Even though the Premier thought North Bay wasn't a good enough place to be, there were certainly better than 30,000 of us who thought that was an excellent place to be, and it was, because the message coming out of that rally and those two days of protest is that this government cannot expect that the sham of a process around 136, apart and aside from the content, is going to be accepted in this province. Make no mistake, 136 and 160 are linked decidedly in the minds of all those you have heard from so far about 136.

Talking about 136 and the sham process we just went through, today we received the long-awaited amendments to Bill 136 that effectively give us a completely different bill. Let me point out: There's Bill 136, as originally printed and presented, and there's the 150 pages of amendments we got a few hours ago — 136 then, 136 now. When do we start clause-by-clause discussion of these detailed legal concepts? At 3:30 today, and somehow that's supposed to be democratic? The fact is you have no interest in listening to anyone. You want to ram through your legislation, ram through your hard-line agenda, without giving a care for anyone, as long as it looks good.

The fact is when I was an alderman in the city of Hamilton, I couldn't get a stop sign put up as quickly as you're ramming 136 through.

AIDS AWARENESS WEEK

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I'm pleased to rise today and report in the House that it's National AIDS Awareness Week. From the beginning, the Harris government has clearly indicated that AIDS is one of its priorities. We're doing more for people with HIV and AIDS than any other government in Canada.

This year alone, the Ontario Ministry of Health will spend almost $56 million for HIV and AIDS programs, and that doesn't even include doctor billings to OHIP. This is close to $16 million more than the federal government spends for all of Canada.

Our funding goes to a wide range of programs including outpatient clinics, supportive housing and drug therapies for people living with HIV. In the last provincial budget we announced we would invest $10 million in the Ontario HIV treatment network. The network will exist to improve the health and quality of life for people living with HIV and AIDS by ensuring high quality and appropriate treatments. I believe these initiatives demonstrate our government's solid and long-term commitment to people living with HIV.

I would like to acknowledge the passing of Mr Andrew Lafontaine, who died of AIDS in January of this year. He served as the co-chair of the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS for over a year. His work and insight will be greatly missed.

As well, I would like to announce the recent appointment of Mr David Hoe of Ottawa as co-chair, a respected voice in the AIDS community who will complement the work of the other co-chair, Dr Anne Phillips of Toronto.

Our province has come a long way in fighting HIV and there is a lot more to be done.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c), the House shall meet from 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm on Monday, September 29, 1997, Tuesday, September 30, 1997, and Wednesday, October 1, 1997, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to request the unanimous consent of the Legislature to have a question period with each of the evening sessions this week.

The Speaker: The member for St Catharines is asking for unanimous consent to have question periods for each of the evening sessions this week. Agreed? I heard a no.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that notwithstanding standing order 95(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot items 105 and 106.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. You will know that Ontario teachers have informed us that some time after the beginning of second reading of the teachers' bill and some time before third reading, 126,000 of them, all Ontario teachers at the primary and secondary levels, are prepared to step outside of the classroom and to go on strike. That strike would affect two million Ontario students. There have to be nearly one million families that would be affected if that was to happen.

One of the single greatest stumbling blocks in the resolution of this matter, and you well recognize this, Premier, is found in the person himself of your minister John Snobelen. Teachers across this province do not have any faith in your minister. They do not believe that he understands the importance of the work they do in classrooms. They do not believe that he values teaching or values teachers themselves.

Will you, given that, demand the resignation of your minister?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): From what I have heard, and I have talked with a number of teachers over the last few days, they are concerned. The teachers I have talked to over the last few days and weeks have told me that they were concerned about school boards and their federations cutting deals to increase class size, and they want that to stop. They have told me that they're a little surprised with all the rhetoric, because they know that the Mike Harris who negotiated with them in Nipissing is fair and reasonable and has always fought for quality education.

That's why I appointed as Minister of Education somebody who shares those same goals. The Honourable John Snobelen from Mississauga North is one whose commitment to quality, to improving excellence, to improving our standard of education is unparalleled in North America.

1350

Mr McGuinty: I'll tell you what your Minister of Education has done to date: So far he's robbed our classes of $533 million; he has killed junior kindergarten; he is attacking special education and he is attacking adult education everywhere across the province.

There is another important stumbling block in the way of a resolution of this matter quite distinct from the minister himself, and that is the fact that he continues to maintain that he will remove another $1 billion from education funding in Ontario. Premier, you yourself can, right now, eliminate that stumbling block by promising that not one more cent will be removed from education in Ontario. Will you do that right now?

Hon Mr Harris: The problem is that the member is coming up with the same amount of accuracy as his critic for health. Most of the stuff he is saying is simply not founded in any facts that I've been able to see.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Oriole, member for Ottawa West and member for Hamilton East, come to order, please.

Hon Mr Harris: This Minister of Education has not cut one single junior kindergarten class throughout the whole province. Junior kindergarten is alive and well in Nipissing, alive and well in Durham. Some boards, even though we still fund the full share of junior kindergarten the same as we do for all other elementary classes, have opted not to have it, many at the insistence of their constituents. Certainly this minister has not condoned or encouraged that.

This minister has never used the figure of $1 billion; you have and others have. He has never used that kind of figure. This minister has never taken a cent out of Ontario classrooms. In fact the legislation that is being brought in is to stop what happened in the last four or five years when money was taken out of the classrooms. That's why this minister has brought in a bill to ensure —

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr McGuinty: Nobody is buying that. Here is a suggestion, Premier: Leave this Legislature, go into half a dozen Ontario classrooms and talk to teachers, those people who do the work on the front lines, and ask those teachers what this minister has done to them and their working conditions. Then you will gain a good understanding of what's happening to education in Ontario.

Premier, you won't get rid of the minister. You will not promise to stop cutting education. There is one other thing you should consider: Put this bill on ice. Why the unseemly haste? Why do you have to rush it through? Why do you have to engage in this politics of brinkmanship on a regular basis? Two million kids could be evicted from their classrooms as early as this week if you don't do something. You've got to intervene. Will you put the bill on ice and withdraw it for the time being?

Hon Mr Harris: It is teachers who have said we need changes. It is the very front-line teachers in the classroom who have been calling for the kinds of changes we have. I would ask the leader of the Liberal Party, if for the first time in your life you want to be constructive, tell us what it is you object to. Do you object in this bill to limiting class size? Do you object to putting more —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: Since this bill takes not a penny from the classroom but merely implements the changes front-line teachers have been talking about, I would ask you, what do you object to? Limiting class size? That's in the bill. Do you object to the longer school year and more contact time with teachers and students? If you do, say so. You see, since you've become leader of the party, you're "No, no, no." You're against everything that comes along. You've never stood for anything constructive, for quality education, for better health care or anything else in this House. That's why you're irrelevant.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr McGuinty: My question is for the Minister of Education and Training, but I might say in passing that arrogance on the part of the government is actually a good sign for us, because it is a classical prelude to the defeat of a government.

Minister, you will know that one of the sticking points in this debate with our teachers is the fact that you have inserted in this bill, through the back door, a provision which allows you to interfere with their right to strike during the transitional period. You have told us that this is purely a technicality and that this was not your intention and really doesn't mean that.

We now have, and you should know this, a legal opinion. The opinion says that such regulatory-making power would permit the stopping of a strike or lockout through regulations resulting in forced arbitration or other methods. No doubt the minister may claim that such power was not intended to be granted; if so, then amendments should be introduced. Will you now admit that you have double-crossed our teachers?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): Nothing could be further from the truth. We obviously met with the teachers' federations and others in education before we brought this legislation forward. We answered their concerns. They had a concern about making sure the federations could represent teachers. We honoured that, although it was recommended in a report that we not do that. We heard them say that they wanted principals in the bargaining unit, that this was the best way to run schools and we honoured that. We heard that the right to strike was very important and we've honoured that.

I showed the Leader of the Opposition last week a legal opinion suggesting that this section of the bill does not in any way, shape or form interfere with the right to strike of teachers. That's my understanding of the legal interpretation of this bill. I'm not a lawyer; the member opposite is. I'm surprised he would bring this up in the first place. What it does do is this: It protects the interests of students during the transition, to make sure their programs are not affected, as we have promised teachers and parents and students. That's what it does.

Mr McGuinty: Your understanding of your bill is wrong. We have a legal opinion that makes it very clear you can stop a strike or a lockout through your own regulations.

Furthermore, you attach such tremendous weight to that provision that you have included in your own bill another section which reads as follows. It says, "In the event of a conflict between that regulation," the one I referred to, "and a provision of this or any other act, the regulation prevails."

What you have taken pains to state in your bill is that if there is any doubt whatsoever, your bill, which reserves unto you the right to interfere with the teachers' right to strike, has to prevail. Your bill, which says you can interfere with the right to strike, will be given primacy. Minister, that's like waving a red flag in front of our teachers. Is this bill really so important that you're prepared to risk putting two million Ontario students out of school?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Again, in view of the fact that I brought this up last week with the Leader of the Opposition, I'm surprised he is taking this tack. I have a letter here from Cassels, Brock and Blackwell that says, "In our view, the enabling legislation would not extend to permit the provincial cabinet to enact legislation relating to labour relation matters." It goes on further to say, "As noted above, the enabling legislation would not give the cabinet the authority to enact regulations relating to labour relation matters."

That's the legal opinion we have on this section of the bill. This section of the bill will certainly allow to us to protect the programs students are engaged in during this transition. This is a legal opinion we have obtained. If he has a counter legal opinion, please send it over and I'll send it to the lawyers in the ministry. I'd be more than happy to do that.

1400

Mr McGuinty: I'll be delighted to send a copy of this opinion over to the minister. Minister, what your words and your actions make perfectly clear to us over here is that you just don't understand how serious this matter is: Two million students have their educational career at risk here; over one million Ontario households are going to be affected by this; and 126,000 teachers have been brought together. That's without precedent. You single-handedly have succeeded in bringing teachers together; in a rather perverse way, you've brought about some unity among our teachers.

You've taken half a billion dollars out of the system. You want to take another $1 billion out. Your actions are about to take our teachers out. Why don't you yourself, Minister, get out? Why don't you simply resign?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The Leader of the Opposition sees a different issue here. I see the issue as being, how do we make sure that our schools provide our students with the opportunities they need? How can we take students in Ontario — despite the fact that we have the best teachers in the world, we have students who are locked in mediocrity, average on the test results in the pan-Canadian international tests.

Our challenge is step by step to build a better education system, to make sure our students have the best perform-

ance of any students in Canada. That's our objective. That's what I work on every day. That's what my colleagues and I are behind. I invite the Leader of the Opposition to join us in making a better education for our young people and a better future for our young people, because that's what this effort is all about.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): A question to the Premier: A couple of hours ago, we got a look at your new Bill 136. I must say, it looks like an entirely new bill, and that's a good thing, because the old one was awful. But you've created another problem along the way, Premier. You see, this is the old bill; it's about 63 pages long. This is the new bill; 150 pages of amendments.

You've also got your time allocation order which says that the 150 pages of amendments have to be considered and dealt with in the next 30 hours. What it amounts to is that once again you're trying to change the laws of Ontario without any public consultation, without allowing the public to understand what you're really putting in place. You're simply trying to ram through your legislation. Premier, we know that when you do that your government makes all kinds of mistakes. You've made mistakes on health care; you've made mistakes elsewhere. Will you withdraw the time allocation order and allow the public time to consider what you're really doing?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I know the Minister of Labour is very anxious to answer and I'll let her do so in a minute, but I want to tell you this: The changes that are being introduced have come from the public, they've come from the unions, they've come from the hospital boards and they've come from the municipalities as a result of extensive consultation over the past year.

If you contrast the amount of consultation on this bill, leading to the bill and the amendments, versus the social contract you jammed through without any hearings at all, the contrast is rather astounding. You may have difficulty understanding it, but the unions don't, the municipalities don't, the hospital boards don't. Those who are affected by the legislation don't have difficulty understanding. In fact, most have been rather supportive that this government has been 10 times more consultative than the government we replaced.

Mr Hampton: Premier, there were a whole bunch of folks in your home riding on the weekend who would very much like the time to completely understand what's in Bill 136. Their point is simply this: You introduced these amendments a couple of hours ago. No one out there in the public has had an opportunity to see them, to understand them or to understand what direction they set.

Let me get right to the point. One of the concerns we have is that you are going to use Bill 136 to in effect take away pay equity from a whole bunch of women who work in the broader public sector. As we read the amendments, that is what you're doing. Can you tell us why you're using Bill 136 to take away pay equity settlements for women who work in the broader public sector? Can you tell us that and can you tell the public that?

Hon Mr Harris: I think the Minister of Labour can.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): I believe if you take a very careful look at the changes which have been introduced today, you will see in there that there have been changes made to the pay equity provisions. We did what we said we'd do: We listened very carefully last week during the course of the consultations and we have made some changes. You will see that we're going to be focusing our legislation very narrowly on the broader public sector restructuring, so we're going to be dealing only with the issue of a sale of a business and we will not be dealing with the issue of pay equity as it relates to home day care providers or retroactivity.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): Minister, you seem to think it's okay for you to hurry up this process for everybody else, that everyone else has to rush through this. Experts, lawyers, labour leaders have been meeting since about 10:30 this morning, just a few hours ago, poring through all these legal amendments, because we have to start voting on them in another hour and a half. If it's okay for everybody else to have to rush through their understanding, let's test your understanding.

All the people who have been looking at subsections 15(6) and (7) of schedule B aren't quite sure what they mean, including the legal labour experts. Will you stand in your place right now and tell us what it means? If you can't, how do you expect your government backbenchers and the rest of us who are on that committee to bloody well start voting on this thing?

Hon Mrs Witmer: If the member opposite would give me an opportunity to find it, I would be very pleased to respond.

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I can understand your desire to get into all of the little nitty-gritty details, because you find it totally —

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Witmer: You seem unable to understand that when we said we were going to listen, when we said we were going to consult and when we said we were going to make changes, we actually followed through on our commitment. We made the three major changes: We did withdraw the restriction on the right to strike; we did eliminate the LRTC and give those provisions to the OLRB; and we did withdraw the DRC.

The Speaker: Answer, please.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would indicate to you that unlike you, we are quite prepared to review the details with you today —

The Speaker: Thank you. New question, leader of the third party.

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EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question to the Premier again, but I'd say to the Minister of Labour, that's part of our job, to look at the nitty-gritty, to make sure the laws in this province make sense.

We have looked at the nitty-gritty of your Bill 160, your changes to education. Not only are you attacking teachers and attacking children, you are also attacking the fundamentals of early childhood education. In fact you're taking away the capacity of the Minister of Education to approve child care centres in schools. In effect, you're trying to take child care centres right out of the education system.

Premier, can you tell us, why are you attacking teachers, why are you attacking children and, most of all, why are you attacking the fundamentals of early childhood education?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I know the Minister of Education can.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): The leader of the third party has I think misrepresented both the bill and the intention of this government.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): You can't say that. It's unparliamentary.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I withdraw that, Mr Speaker. His representations are not consistent with my understanding of the bill; let me put it to you that way.

First of all, this government has very clearly recognized the importance of early childhood education. We have worked with the community to make sure that we have that available in our schools. As the Premier mentioned a few moments ago, we continue to fund junior kindergarten at the same rate that we fund other programs in our schools. We have obviously committed to stable funding throughout the entire year and we are working very hard on finishing an allocation model which will meet the needs of those students right across the province. That's what we're doing. Our track record is very clear. We're keeping the promises we made to the people of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: I know when the Minister of Education is in trouble. First he accuses other people of misrepresenting, and then he mumbles.

It's in your own bill. You no longer have the authority under the Education Act, if your bill becomes law, to provide for capital allocations so that we can have child care centres in our schools. Not only that, you take right out of the Education Act any consideration that a child care classroom in a school is a permanent improvement within the meaning of the act. In other words, you're trying to write child care totally out of the education system.

Already in this province we have over 1,300 classrooms in our schools that are being used for child care. It is absolutely essential in many of our schools, because we have single-parent mothers who want to go back to school, who want to have their children cared for. I put it to you: Why are you attacking early childhood education? Why are you going to make it so much more difficult for —

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mr Snobelen: We obviously have viewed child care as a very important issue, and obviously my colleague at the Ministry of Community and Social Services has been working very hard to make sure that those services are available.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): You cut the funding anyway. They have been closing down for two years.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): We have 3,000 more day care spaces, Sandra.

Mrs Pupatello: That is a lie.

The Speaker: You must go back to your seat to withdraw that. You must be in your seat.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Yes, you have to go back to your seat. Member for Yorkview, you can go back to your seat at the same time.

Mrs Pupatello: I withdraw, Speaker.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Those issues are being addressed and are being improved on for the people of Ontario, but the leader of the third party does not recognize that what this government is doing is changing fundamentally how we meet the needs in education right across the province.

I'd invite the leader of the third party to come to my riding and talk to the people who have been waiting three and four and five years since when you were in government to get a school built in their area. It's time to change that, to bring it into this century before we get to the next one. That's the intention of this bill, to meet the needs of our students right across the province and make sure there are schools for them. That's why we're doing it.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Minister, even the Common Sense Revolution recognized the value of child care for parent students. It promises a learning and earning and parenting program, saying, "Young single parents on welfare will be encouraged to stay in school and complete their educations."

Instead of following through on that promise, you're threatening programs like the YMCA child care program located at the Alexander Henry High School in Sault Ste Marie, where 24 children are cared for while their parents, aged 15 to their early 20s, finish high school.

The supervisor, Penny Kucyk, tells us that she is aware of only four people who have not graduated into the workforce or further education since the centre opened. Why do you want to get rid of child care centres like the one at the Alexander Henry High School in Sault Ste Marie?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I remind the member of what this government has done to support very young people in this province, including the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program that we put $10 million into; the preschool speech and language services for children, another $20 million;

Better Beginnings, Better Futures, a program you should know about that has $4.6 million. We've committed to over $200 million over the next five years to make a difference for those young people. This is an extraordinary investment in the very young people in this province.

Let me tell you what we're interested in reducing. We're interested in reducing the over 10,000 portables that our students are in, in this province, because of you. That is why we're changing it, to get rid of those portables.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES PROGRAM

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier regarding a four-month-old baby girl living in the Ottawa area. Her name is Alyssa Larabie. Her paediatrician has made an assessment that she could die in her sleep as a result of sudden infant death syndrome and has requested that she be provided with a special monitor until reaching the age of somewhere between nine months and 12 months.

You have made a change to the assistive devices program and effectively have said you will no longer pay for these special monitors beyond the age of six months. The paediatrician is saying that this baby should have a monitor until she is at least nine months of age. You have changed the law so that now you're only paying for it until she reaches the age of six months.

I wonder, Premier, first of all if you knew about that; and second, recognizing that the paediatrician has made an important decision in this matter, will you now intervene and ensure that Alyssa Larabie has this monitor until she's at least nine months of age?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Yes.

Mr McGuinty: Why did I have to learn about this story in the Ottawa Citizen? I had to stand in this Legislature and bring this matter to your attention for you to personally intervene. I'm not sure how many other cases there are like this throughout the province, but just so I'm perfectly clear on this, you are now saying that we are going to change the policy for the assistive devices program in Ontario for every child, and that if any paediatrician deems it appropriate and fit that a child be equipped with a monitor until nine months or 12 months, that's the end of it and you will pay for it? Am I correct in that regard, Premier?

Hon Mr Harris: First of all, you didn't have to raise it in the House; it has already been dealt with. The family has been notified and they will receive it.

I'd love to tell you that in spending the $18 billion that we spend, each and every decision is perfectly executed and there's never any error, there's never any medical decision that is wrong for whatever reason, that everything in the world is perfect. That is not always the case. From time to time there are situations that arise. If you hear of any, we're happy to have you pass them over to us.

There is a policy that has been brought into place that talks in generalities in consultation with the medical community. If there are exceptions to be made, gosh darn, let me know and we'll look after it.

IPPERWASH PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): My question is to the Premier. I hope he is as positive and taciturn in his response to my question as he was to the Leader of the Opposition's first question. My question is regarding Ipperwash and the wrongful death of Dudley George.

Earlier today the crown dropped weapons charges against one of the young demonstrators who drove a car at the riot police on the night of September 6, 1995, the night Dudley George was killed. We have known all along that the demonstration at Ipperwash Provincial Park posed no threat to public safety. Even the OPP identified no public risk and told the interministerial committee that at the meeting Deb Hutton, the Premier's executive assistant, attended. On the next day, the OPP buildup occurred, though, and the police used force to try to enter the park. We've been saying that this is an unprecedented buildup that led to a man's death.

Now another outstanding charge is out of the way. This was the last criminal trial arising out of the events on September 6 and it has now been disposed of. There is no reason to stall on a public inquiry. Premier, it's time to call a public inquiry.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I know the Attorney General —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Attorney General.

1420

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): There are still matters of appeal before the courts, there are civil actions before the courts, and my understanding is that the crown is continuing with three charges that are presently before the courts even though a couple of those charges have been withdrawn.

Mr Wildman: To deal with the minister responsible for native affairs and the Attorney General, the Supreme Court of Canada has given some clear guidelines regarding inquiries so there cannot be any excuse about legal issues pending in this particular situation. In the case of Westray and most recently in the Krever blood inquiry, the Supreme Court clarified the circumstances in which you can have an inquiry even when there are civil and/or criminal investigations outstanding. The Supreme Court ruling on Krever states:

"The ability of an inquiry to investigate, educate and inform Canadians benefits our society. A public inquiry before an impartial and independent commissioner which investigates the cause of tragedy and makes recommendations for change can help to prevent a recurrence of such tragedies in the future."

All the information we have is that the government can now have a public inquiry. What is the government hiding? When are you going to call a public inquiry? Will you follow the Supreme Court ruling?

Hon Mr Harnick: The member has been told before, and I will say again, that no one has precluded an inquiry taking place. No decision has been made about that. When all the criminal matters and the civil matter and the appeals are dealt with and the three outstanding charges are completed, that's something we will consider. Consideration of that has never been precluded.

ELECTRICAL POWER

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. In my riding the Peterborough Utilities Commission, and many other local municipal electric utilities across Ontario, are in the process of restructuring the manner in which power is supplied to the customer. As you can well appreciate, recent problems at Ontario Hydro have created a number of questions and concerns.

The PUC is of the understanding that potential legislation is being drafted that would permit third-party access to the system. This would allow any electric supplier the option to supply electricity to any customer in Ontario. The supplier would then have to pay a toll fee to the owners for the use of wires required to deliver electricity. Minister, can you inform me whether legislation to allow third-party access is being prepared by your ministry, or can we expect this issue to be addressed in the upcoming white paper on electricity?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): Many of the municipal electric utilities are interested in the government's plans to restructure its electricity sector. There are some 306 municipal electrical utilities across the province. We are drafting our paper to introduce a competitive environment in Ontario to ensure that we will have the lowest possible electricity rates for our future generations. That will entail a number of changes in the existing structure. It will introduce competition at various and different levels.

I look forward to introducing this paper and being able to clarify these issues with the public in the very near future. We are not at the present time drafting legislation. That would come after the introduction of the white paper.

Mr Stewart: Third-party access is a very serious issue. Local MEUs feel that if third-party access becomes a reality, it should be phased in over a number of years. Issues such as rate subsidies or preferential treatment of large urban customers over rural customers by suppliers must be carefully thought out. Minister, can you reassure my local utility that issues such as third-party access and all other important issues will be carefully thought out before long-term, permanent actions on restructuring take place.

Hon Mr Sterling: There has already been a significant amount of consultation take place with regard to these kinds of issues. There's the Macdonald advisory committee. My ministry has engaged all different stakeholders with regard to their interests in this issue. When the white paper will be issued, the select committee on nuclear affairs will no doubt be discussing some of these issues as well. Then we will have of course the necessity of introducing legislation in front of this House.

There will be an adequate source of opportunities for the municipal electric utilities to let us know of their feelings with regard to the competitive nature of our structure as well as to the timing of when those particular aspects of that white paper and the legislation should kick in.

I understand their feelings, but our goal is to get to a competitive system in order to provide the best possible rates for our future Ontario citizens.

ELGIN-MIDDLESEX DETENTION CENTRE

Mr Peter North (Elgin): My question is for the Solicitor General. Minister, I've asked you on a couple of different occasions questions with regard to the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. Last week you stood in the House and talked about the federal government and what it was doing with regard to young offenders.

In my questions, I've asked you with regard to the people who have been dismissed by your ministry with regard to the incident at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. I want to know if you can tell me what happened between June 6, 1996, when you made a commitment in this Legislature to a member of the third party to do an inquiry, and June 9, when members of your ministry, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Community and Social Services and cabinet office met on a Sunday afternoon and decided to suspend those four people at that time, and subsequently on what grounds you came to dismiss these people in the months that followed.

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services): The member knows there are a number of matters before the courts with respect to this situation and a number of the individuals whom he is representing, so I'm very limited in what I can say with respect to those circumstances. I know he fully appreciates that.

Mr North: I sincerely do fully appreciate that, but I'm not asking you about court proceedings. I'm asking you about process in the Ministry of the Solicitor General, the Ministry of the Attorney General and the government of Ontario.

These people have been fired from their jobs. These people have not been found guilty of a single crime in Ontario. These people have not been served natural justice by the province of Ontario. So I think it's incumbent on me and incumbent on you as the Solicitor General to explain to these people what exactly they are guilty of and why they are fired. It is important to people who are losing their homes, people who are losing their families, people who have lost their dignity in the community, and people who have lost a tremendous amount of respect and in some cases their mental health as a result of the decision that your and other ministries have made. It is time for you to produce some proof, some evidence, some basis in fact to show these people why —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Solicitor General.

Hon Mr Runciman: Again, the member is aware that the process is under way with respect to the dismissals involved where the individuals involved will have the opportunity to have their day in court, if you will, with respect to whether the dismissals were indeed justified.

The member and I have had this discussion with respect to the role played by a minister. The minister in any ministry in this government is not making hiring or firing decisions. Those decisions lie with the senior levels of the civil service and the bureaucracy. They are not decisions made by the minister. I have explained that to him on a number of occasions.

I very much appreciate his concern with respect to his constituents, but because of a variety of constraints, I can say no more.

1430

CHARITABLE GAMING

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): My question is for the Premier. In Mike Harris's Ontario, you said that you wanted to give citizens of the province more say in where we locate casinos. In Mike Harris's Ontario, you wanted to give more autonomy to local governments.

Community after community has said no to charitable gaming casinos. Now we read that municipalities will receive an annual fee of $1,500 per video lottery machine in charitable gaming clubs for services. Premier, who is going to pay this fee?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I know that the minister —

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): We've gone through a process over the last several months where the municipalities have expressed some concern in terms of what will happen after the implementation of the charity gaming clubs. They have said they need to monitor the process; they need to have some involvement with the processing of the sites to be selected.

We have listened to the municipalities. We are giving them some resources to deal with this. Yes, it's $1,500 per machine.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: I don't believe the municipalities think this is a laughing matter. Clearly what we're trying to do is compensate them for resources they're going to have to utilize.

Let's not lose sight of what this is about. This is about replacing a system that does not work and has not worked under any of the previous governments because of a lack of monitoring, because of a lack of accountability. This is all about accountability to both the taxpayer and the charities in this province.

Mr Crozier: I'd like the record to note that first of all the minister didn't answer the question. I asked specifically who is going to pay the $1,500. Some people have said this is a bribe to the municipalities. I suggest that it's a move to put pressure on municipalities by charities in order that the government can buy some moral persuasion, some moral protection.

Minister, what price will you actually pay to justify your downloading to the municipalities and subsequent attempt through this means to pay them off so that they might accept a charitable casino?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Currently, under the previous NDP government and the previous Liberal government, the system has been that the municipalities have been participating, whether it has been through the charity bingos or whether it has been through the break-open tickets, and certainly with respect to the roving casinos, but unfortunately there has not been the accountability that's necessary to deal with this. This is all about making sure there's accountability back to the various communities, back to the charities and certainly back to the taxpayer.

Despite what the member is suggesting, there are many people across the province and many municipal mayors who are indicating that's not the case. Very recently, on September 27 in the St Catharines Standard, Fort Erie Mayor John Teal indicated that he welcomes the resources and he doesn't see it the same way as the member does. Clearly this is all about creating a new system that works and getting rid of a system that didn't work.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. You know as well as we all do that when polyvinyl chlorides are burned, we get dioxins. Dioxin is the most toxic substance known on this planet. Yet when we had the Plastimet fire in Hamilton, there was no declaration of a hazardous materials fire. Had there been — and we know now in hindsight that there should have been — firefighters would have been wearing better equipment, there would have been decontamination units on the site, the evacuation might have taken place sooner. Certainly the people who were sitting by the fire with lawn chairs would have been advised that this was very serious. The police would have been better equipped to protect themselves and protect the public and perhaps there might even have been a need to evacuate the hospital that was ultimately exposed.

Minister, without a public inquiry to determine exactly when a hazardous material fire should be called, how can you guarantee that although there aren't dead bodies in Hamilton because of the fire this time, there won't be the next time?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): Of course no one anticipates having a fire in any kind of situation. Therefore, when a fire does occur, there is a call to the Ministry of Environment and we dispatch the information we have in our files to the fire department and the medical officer of health.

In this case, we had information as to the material at that particular site and we informed the fire department within an hour and a half of the fire beginning. I don't

know any other kind of system which would provide any more speedy response, which would provide a more technical response than we were able to provide in this case.

Mr Christopherson: Two things, Minister: First of all, the fact that you don't know doesn't mean they don't exist. In fact it points all the more to the fact that we ought to hold a public inquiry so we can find out how we can do that. For you to just say you don't know is not acceptable.

And let me say, to say no one anticipates a fire, what are fire plans for? Give me a break. Of course you plan for a fire. You don't hope it happens, but you plan for it.

Minister, you have sloughed off all calls for a public inquiry by saying it's just politics. I've pointed out to you that our local officials, both of our local councils, other municipal councils across the province and the Hamilton Spectator editorials five times have called for one. You still say we're all playing politics.

The latest one to call for a public inquiry is your own backbencher from Hamilton Mountain, who says, "I believe that the Plastimet fire is a unique event that necessitates a full public probe into how and why it began and how its aftermath was handled by all levels of government." We agree with the member for Hamilton Mountain. What do you say to him?

Hon Mr Sterling: Contrary to how previous governments acted, our backbenchers have their own individual opinions, and from time to time they express those opinions in public. In this case I don't agree with the member for Hamilton Mountain with regard to this particular matter, but I respect him for putting forward his opinion.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): I would like to respond to a question from the member for Wilson Heights on September 16, concerning the TTC and its intention to purchase additional buses.

I would like to start off by saying that thanks to the growing economy, the TTC is blessed with an increase in its ridership and requires additional buses before they were anticipated. In May of this year the TTC issued tenders to purchase 100 monocoque buses with lifts and up to 50 low-floor buses from three manufacturers.

Although there is only one supplier for the monocoque buses, all three manufacturers make low-floor buses and two of these companies bid on the low-floor portion of the tender. Orion Bus Industries manufactures low-floor buses; however, they did not bid on the low-floor portion of the tender.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Palladini: The TTC is satisfied that it has conducted a competitive tendering process. However, I do have some questions about their decision.

The Speaker: Member for Wilson Heights.

Mr Monte Kwinter (Wilson Heights): It's a little difficult for me to respond when I haven't heard the concerns of the minister, but I will say this: The facts of the matter are quite simple. The government has a policy of funding only low-floor buses, and these particular buses are not low-floor buses. The other thing is that they're going to be built in Roswell, New Mexico, with 60,000 man-days of labour that could sorely be used in Ontario. Again, the government is funding that.

My question is, and I am very anxious to hear the minister's reply to his original statement, what is the government going to do about it? Are they going to allow the TTC to place that order?

Hon Mr Palladini: I am aware, number one, that disabled groups have expressed opposition to the high-floor bus purchases, and several of them have actually written to the ministry and to me personally to express their concerns.

I would like to inform the honourable member that I have written a letter to the Toronto Transit Commission asking for further information about this particular purchase. As I indicated to the member when he asked the question, I am reviewing the TTC's request for another exemption to the low-floor bus policy and hope to have a decision shortly.

1440

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): My question is to the Minister of Education. We are on the verge of a crisis of epic proportion in education which is going to affect in excess of two million students because of Mike Harris's new education bill, Bill 160. As late as Saturday evening, on Focus Ontario, you continued to say, "I encourage the teachers to talk to me; I encourage them to dialogue and to meet with me."

Earlier today, in response to a question from the third party, you invited the member to your riding to find out at first hand. This evening in Sudbury members from all the affiliates will be meeting at the Caruso Club to voice their concerns about Bill 160. There will be in excess of 2,000 teachers at tonight's meeting. I have purchased a return ticket for you. Will you accompany me to that meeting tonight?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): Obviously there is now some dispute about whether or not a plane ticket has actually been purchased. If it has been, please send it over with a page and I'll have a look at it; if it hasn't — well, just send it over and we'll have a look at the ticket.

I can tell you, and the member should know, that I spent an awful lot of time over the course of the last two and a half years in classrooms talking with teachers, talking with students, and I've spent a lot of time talking with parents. I know their concerns. The door remains open at the Ministry of Education, and I'm glad to have this chance again today to say publicly that the door is open, that I'm willing to meet with the teacher union heads at any time to talk about this bill, to talk about the future of education. From what I've heard from teachers, we have alignment on the need to improve education for our students, on the need to find a funding system that better meets the needs of students and teachers in the classroom.

That's what we're working towards. The door is open. I look forward to meeting with those teachers.

Mr Bartolucci: On November 19, 1996, I invited you to tour overcrowded classes with me. Sadly, you said you were too busy. Today you say you're not going. I ask you again, will you accompany me to Sudbury to hear at first hand from the teachers, the group you say you want to meet with, about what their concerns and their alternatives are to Bill 160? Will you come with me or are you too busy again?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The member opposite hasn't responded to the request to send the ticket over. I think there might be some hyperbole going on with the member opposite, but let me tell you I take this very seriously.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Snobelen: While the member opposite would like to engage in theatrics on this subject, it is a very serious one. We do have to have constructive talks. We've demonstrated over the past two weeks that when we get together with teachers' representatives and the ministry, we can come up with agreements that work in the best interests of the young people of the province of Ontario. It's time now to do that again.

I have said time and again, and I've said again today, my door is open. I welcome those conversations. I'll meet teachers' unions whenever they ask me to. I guarantee that I believe and my colleagues believe that those kinds of conversations can be fruitful for the young people of this province. That's why we want to engage in them.

VIDEO LOTTERY TERMINALS

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and it's with respect to your program of introduction of video lottery terminals. You're proceeding at this point with phase one. I have two simple questions to you. First, could you tell me whether phase one, which I know includes racetracks, also includes the Ontario Jockey Club's teletheatre on the Greenwood site? Second, would you tell me, if the municipality says no to video lottery terminals, will you stop the implementation of them in the racetracks?

Hon William Saunderson (Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism): Mr Speaker, I would like to refer the question to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, please.

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I believe the situation is right now that the proponents have been selected for the charity gaming clubs. It is up to them at this point in time to find appropriate locations. This is partly why we're allocating the amount we are for the video lottery terminals and the charity gaming clubs, so they can have meaningful discussions with their communities to ensure that the appropriate locations are selected.

PETITIONS

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): I have a petition here dealing with Bill 136. It's addressed to the Honourable Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the following undersigned citizens of Ontario, beg leave to petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Bill 136, the Public Sector Dispute Resolution Act, 1997, will not meet its stated objective to facilitate collective bargaining in the event of mergers and amalgamations; and

"Further, if enacted, Bill 136 will interfere with free collective bargaining, impose a new bureaucratic and dictatorial regime, remove the right to fair and impartial arbitration of disputes and the right to strike; and

"Whereas the Ontario Labour Relations Board has a long and successful history of mediating labour disputes;

"Therefore, in the interest of maintaining and enhancing quality public services provided by dedicated public employees, we hereby petition the Ontario government to withdraw its proposed Bill 136 legislation and support a fair and workable system that will not disrupt the supply of public services to the community or the livelihoods of thousands of Ontarians."

It has been signed by some 25 people, and I affix my signature to it as well.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I have a petition sent to Mike Harris's government that is holding public hearings on Bill 136 in the city of Toronto only for four days, and nowhere else in Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, are petitioning the Ontario government to hold public hearings here in Sault Ste Marie on Bill 136."

It's signed by literally hundreds of my constituents. I sign it myself and will pass it on to the Clerk's desk.

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton): I have a petition signed by eight people. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government has failed to address the root causes of waste, duplication and unnecessary administration in our health care system; and

"Whereas the provincial government has instead introduced Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, that makes it easier for employers to reduce the numbers of front-line staff and to lower their salaries and benefits and thus causing further deterioration of quality patient care; and

"Whereas Bill 136 also erodes the democratic process by tampering with collective agreements and potentially interfering with workers' choice of bargaining agents;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136, the Public

Sector Transition Stability Act, and restructure the health care system in a safe, coordinated and rational way."

1450

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly that reads as follows:

"Whereas Windsor-Essex county was the first community to undergo hospital restructuring; and

"Whereas the community supported the recommendations of the Win-Win report based on a funding model that included the expansion of community-based care; and

"Whereas recent reports estimate that Windsor-Essex hospitals are underfunded by approximately $122 per person; and

"Whereas this represents the lowest funding per capita for hospital services of any community in Ontario with a population of over 200,000; and

"Whereas hospitals across the province have been forced to further reduce expenditures 18%; and

"Whereas these cuts have forced hospitals to eliminate emergency services in the west end of Windsor and cut desperately needed services; and

"Whereas the minister acknowledged that additional funding was necessary in high-growth areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister of Health to provide the appropriate level of funding to hospitals in Windsor-Essex which would allow Windsor Regional Hospital to provide urgent care services for the west-end community and to restore equitable health care funding across Windsor and Essex county."

I join with hundreds of my fellow citizens of Windsor in signing this petition.

BEAR HUNTING

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas black bear populations in Ontario are healthy with between 75,000 and 100,000 animals and their numbers are stable or increasing in many areas of the province; and

"Whereas black bear hunting is enjoyed by over 20,000 hunters annually in Ontario and black bears are a well-managed renewable resource; and

"Whereas hunting regulations are based on sustained yield principles and all forms of hunting are needed to optimize the socioeconomic benefits associated with hunting; and

"Whereas the value of the spring bear hunt to tourist operators in northern Ontario is $30 million annually, generating about 500 person-years of employment; and

"Whereas animal rights activists have launched a campaign of misinformation and emotional rhetoric to ban bear hunting and end our hunting heritage in Ontario, ignoring the enormous impact this would have on the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government protect our hunting heritage and continue to support all current forms of black bear hunting."

This is signed by about 225 residents of the province of Ontario, and pursuant to the standing orders, I am affixing my signature to it.

EDUCATION ISSUES

Mr Harry Danford (Hastings-Peterborough): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It comes on behalf of many of my constituents and others within the province and it deals with education issues.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): The following petition was presented to me like this, and I understand that T-shirts are not allowed, so I'll put it down, but it was presented by Marg Rondina with regard to that. I said that I would do that.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government has failed to address the root causes of waste, duplication and unnecessary administration in our health care system; and

"Whereas the provincial government has instead introduced Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, that makes it easier for employers to reduce the numbers of front-line staff and to lower their salaries and benefits and thus causing further deterioration of quality patient care; and

"Whereas Bill 136 also erodes the democratic process by tampering with collective agreements and potentially interfering with workers' choice of bargaining agent;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, and restructure the health care system in a safe, coordinated and rational way."

I thank Marg Rondina for collecting these 2,000 signatures, and I sign it.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario has decided to reduce taxes by 30%; and

"Whereas this government has proceeded to reduce the level of public health care service through the hospital restructuring committee; and

"Whereas complementary legislation such as Bill 7, Bill 26 and Bill 136 are turning the negotiation process into a one-sided sham; and

"Whereas the morale of these front-line health care employees has hit rock bottom;

"We, the undersigned organized service and practical nursing staff of the London Health Sciences Centre, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To withdraw Bill 136 and to re-establish the funding and level of service in the public hospital sector."

I agree with this petition, which is signed by approximately 500 people from London, and I am affixing my signature.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Parkdale): I have a petition addressed to the Legislature of Ontario and, by the way, it's signed by a number of people from Parkdale and also from Davenport. It reads:

"We believe that the heart of education in our province is in the relationship between students and teachers and that this human and relational dimension should be maintained and extended in any proposed reform. The Minister of Education and Training should know how strongly we oppose many of the secondary reform recommendations being proposed by the ministry and government.

"We recognize and support the need to review secondary education in Ontario. The proposal for reform as put forward by the ministry is substantially flawed in several key areas: reduced instruction time, reduction in instruction in English, reduction of qualified teaching personnel, academic work experience credit not linked to educational curriculum, devaluation of formal education" etc.

I will cut this short by simply adding one more paragraph. I will not read the rest. It says:

"We strongly urge the ministry to delay the implementation of secondary school reform so that all interested stakeholders — parents, students, school councils, trustees, teachers and everyone — are able to participate in a more meaningful consultation process which will help ensure that a high quality of publicly funded education is provided."

I am delighted to add my signature to this document.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Bill 136 gives employers unrestricted rights to tear up collective agreements. It affects union rights, workplace rights and seniority rights of many working people in Ontario.

"For health care workers who have not had the right to strike since 1964, it takes away the fair and independent arbitration system that up until now satisfactorily resolved contract disputes between labour and management. The existing arbitration system also ensured smooth transitions in hospital mergers.

"With last week's announcement, the government of Ontario is clearly moving in the right direction on Bill 136. However, we have no guarantee of that until we see the wording of the proposed amendments.

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, demand that the Legislature of Ontario immediately make public the amendments to Bill 136 and hold public hearings on Bill 136 in communities throughout the province."

That's signed by hundreds of people who are involved in the health care sector in Windsor from AAHPO, CUPE, ONA, OPEIU, OPSEU and SEIU.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): I rise in my place to present a petition to the Legislature regarding protecting education services in Ontario.

"To the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas the Harris government is proposing detrimental changes to education services in Ontario;

"Whereas the government's obsession with the fiscal bottom line will result in a reduction of the quality of education services for our children;

"Whereas inclusive and open consultation on education reform has not taken place;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario reconsider its direction in terms of education policy and that they halt any further changes to the education system until a thorough and inclusive review has taken place."

I am pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

SOCCER FIELD

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition that petitions the Ontario Legislature as follows:

"We, the undersigned residents of the province of Ontario, petition the Ontario provincial government to keep the London Psychiatric Hospital's soccer fields for use as youth soccer fields even in the event of the closing of the hospital."

This is the first of a large number of petitions that are coming in and it is signed by 500 citizens of London, Brantford and all of southwestern Ontario.

1500

VIDEO LOTTERY TERMINALS

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): A very topical subject these days: I have a petition to the government of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Since video lottery terminals will contribute to gambling addiction in Ontario and the resulting breakup of families, spousal and child abuse and crimes such as embezzlement and robbery; and

"Since the introduction of video lottery terminals across Ontario will provide those addicted to gambling with widespread temptation and will attract young people to a

vice which will adversely affect their lives for many years to come; and

"Since the introduction of these gambling machines across our province is designed to gain revenue for the government at the expense of the poor, the vulnerable and the desperate in order that the government can cut income taxes, to the greatest benefit of those with the highest income; and

"Since the placement of video lottery terminals in bars in Ontario and in permanent casinos in various locations across the province represents an escalation of gambling opportunities; and

"Since Premier Harris and Finance Minister Eves were so critical of the provincial government becoming involved in further gambling ventures and making the government more dependent on gambling revenues to maintain government operations;

"We, the undersigned, call upon Premier Harris and the government of Ontario to reconsider its announced decision to introduce the most insidious form of gambling, video lottery terminals, to restaurants and bars in the province."

I affix my signature as I'm in full agreement with the contents of this petition.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I have a petition and letter from numerous members of CUPE in Sault Ste Marie in opposition to Bill 136. It says:

"This letter is written to express opposition to Bill 136. Bill 136 will only serve to distort the balance between workers and management by shifting all advantages in management's favour. We've worked for years to establish an equilibrium between these two parties, and it's very important that it remain. In the past, employers and workers have completed mergers and amalgamations on their own, very successfully, without government intervention.

"As a member of your constituency" — talking to me — "I'm requesting you to oppose the passing of Bill 136."

I will certainly be doing that.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): Speaker, pursuant to the standing orders, I wish to advise you of my dissatisfaction with the response of the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations to my question on charitable gaming casinos.

The reason for my dissatisfaction is that I asked the minister who will pay the $1,500 per video gaming slot machine fee to municipalities. The minister did not answer the question. I will file this with the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ÉDUCATION

Mr Snobelen moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size / Projet de loi 160, Loi visant à réformer le système scolaire, à protéger le financement des classes, à accroître l'obligation de rendre compte et à apporter d'autres améliorations compatibles avec la politique du gouvernement en matière de qualité de l'éducation, y compris l'amélioration du rendement des élèves et la réglementation de l'effectif des classes.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I'd like to mention before I begin that I'm splitting my time today with the member for Middlesex and the member for Huron.

Today I'm pleased to begin a very public debate on second reading of Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act. This bill is a significant step in building the future of education in Ontario, a significant step in building a solid foundation for our youth and a significant step in addressing the decade-old grievances within the structure of our schools.

We would all agree that our students deserve the very best, we would all agree that our students must measure up to the best in Canada and the best in the world and we would all agree that our children should not pay for their own education, as they do when we leave them our debts.

Let me be very clear. When we burden our children with our debts, as we have in the past, we diminish their futures. When we formed the government, each of our students owed $41,000, and year after year deficits have added to this burden. For the sake of our children's future, we must embrace the challenge of change: change in curriculum from fuzzy, feel-good outcomes to measurable, year-by-year standards, standards that are regularly tested and clearly communicated to parents and students through a province-wide report card; change to a four-year high school, a high school that recognizes the needs of the 70% who have been left out; change in the governance of schools, with less bureaucracy and fewer politicians, with clear accountability for the ministry, the boards, principals, teachers, parents and students, a governance model built up from the classroom, not down from the boardroom; and change in how we fund our schools from the general legislative grants system. This is a system that was perfectly designed to hide provincial politicians from accountability. We propose a system designed to meet the

needs of our students and to end the old game of hide and seek between the province and the boards.

Make no mistake about it. The easiest way for the province to reduce its costs is to reduce the GLGs, to let the boards pile up more property tax or to add to the provincial debt, as have previous governments, with no intention of paying it off, preferring to leave that burden to our children. This government is committed to a different path, to taking on the burden of fully funding our schools and to being fully accountable for providing for our students; and most important, to being accountable for our students' performance.

In his review of Bill 100, Mr Paroian asked groups presenting to him a simple question: "Where does the buck stop in education?" He got the same answer that has frustrated parents and taxpayers and teachers for decades: "The buck stops nowhere. No one is accountable." Once and for all this bill will allow us to say, "The buck stops here." For too long the legitimate bargaining for wages and benefits for our teachers has been cloaked in what is best for our students, but the result of the bargaining has been the opposite: larger classes and less time with teachers, and this simply cannot continue.

In the last two years a number of school boards have increased their class sizes. Some of them, like York region, Haldimand county and Lakehead district secondary, have done so in collaboration with teachers' unions. Our bill would cap class size and guarantee that quality for our students is not negotiable.

Bargaining has also increased taxes way out of proportion with inflation. Our young people pay for high taxes. They pay with their jobs as investment in Ontario declines. This cannot continue. Our bill would end the spiralling education property taxes.

Over the past two decades, the bargaining atmosphere between teachers and school boards has gotten in the way of making many quality decisions for education. Ultimately, sadly, this diminishes the teaching profession in the eyes of the public. This doesn't serve the interests of our students or the interests of our teachers. I believe we must reverse this trend. That is why I was proud to introduce the College of Teachers and why I believe we must have a forum to discuss the changes openly, publicly and regularly.

Old political wisdom would suggest that we should hide from tough questions like: Why is our student performance not the best in Canada? Why are our costs high? Why do our students spend less time on task than students in other provinces? Why are our secondary school teachers out of the classroom more than their colleagues in other provinces? Tough questions, but it's our duty to ask them openly and publicly and to listen very carefully for the responses.

As this bill moves through the democratic process, our task is to engage the questions and to listen with great care. I sought political office for one purpose and one purpose only: to do my part to leave a legacy to the children that is even better and brighter than the future left to me by my parents; to leave a richer possibility for a better life to my niece and my nephew.

I believe we can do that, but it means having the courage to engage the tough questions, the strength to withstand criticism and the wisdom to listen. In the end, I believe we have the courage, the strength and the collective wisdom to make a better place for our children. That is my purpose and my joy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Further debate?

1510

Mr Bruce Smith (Middlesex): It's certainly a pleasure to rise today and have the opportunity to share in support of this bill and to compliment the Minister of Education on his comments previously.

I want to start from the perspective of complimenting and recognizing the achievements of students in this province, because there has been a considerable achievement by many students. When I reflect upon the London area and look at three students who won first place in the Ontario Mathematics Olympics earlier this year and a Bramalea student who has been named the 1996 Junior Citizen of the Year by the Ontario Community Newspaper Association, there certainly are many worthwhile achievements that are being recognized by our young people in this province.

The objective of this legislation and many of the reforms that the minister has introduced is simply to ensure that there are more young people such as the ones I just referenced, young people who continue to be leaders in our society and young people who are prepared to act on the opportunities that I think this legislation will present for young people across the province.

We continually see — and I don't think there would be much disagreement — that children, students in this province, will face a much more complex, fast-paced and highly technological world. They will need a high level of skills and knowledge to meet all of those challenges that are presented to them. They'll certainly need to learn a new set of skills throughout their lives to meet these challenges of tomorrow and challenges that will present opportunities for new jobs in a new century when specialization and education is paramount.

Right now too many students are not as prepared as those young people whom I referred to earlier, the ones I just applauded. There is opportunity to expand upon the numbers of those individuals and move forward. Time and again we hear parents and students talking about the actions of this government and its predecessors, and they have expressed concern about the quality of education in this province. They've expressed concern relative to achievement of students, not just internationally but collectively, locally within the province and on a national level.

There's much debate and many theories of why this has come about and a great deal of time could be spent debating that particular issue. But the bottom line is our students and our children deserve much better. The bottom line is that Ontarians are not getting the best return on

their investment in education. Certainly our students deserve more.

My belief is our students should be among the best in the world. As I indicated earlier, many of them are. Our teachers should be among the best in the world. I would recognize, as I have met with teachers in northern Ontario and central Algoma last week, teachers in Elgin county this morning, there is certainly the dedication and commitment that needs to be brought to the classroom on a day-to-day basis to ensure that our students are achieving and to ensure that the delivery of the service is the best it can be.

It's really not about just students and teachers; it's about addressing problems within the system, a system that can be remedied and a system that will provide us with the best education in the world. Previous governments have responded with studies and commissions. I think it's important to realize that no other particular issue has been more studied by government agencies or government itself than the field of education.

I don't believe the students of Ontario need another royal commission. It's time for action. It's time to make the publicly funded school system more accountable. It's time to build a system that will provide answers to parents' and students' needs. It's time to build a new system that will bring education back as the fabric of our province's planning for tomorrow. It's a time to build new partnerships. Certainly, as we move through some difficult transition periods, it's very evident to me in my capacity as parliamentary assistant that those partnerships are materializing, and those are to be encouraged and built upon.

It's time to use proven methods to build a better education system, to understand those methods and apply them wherever possible. Very clearly, whether it's educators, government people, taxpayers or parents, we all can agree that our bottom-line objective here is to bring the best-quality education in the most cost-effective manner, not with the total focus on cost-effectiveness, but one that delivers a quality education for all of our students in the best possible way.

In January the minister announced our government's intention to move Ontario students to the head of the class. Certainly that commitment has been very evident and I think met very positively by most educators in the province. As I have met with teachers, I find, particularly in the elementary panel, a very clear focus, notwithstanding some of the areas of concern, on the issues of quality, recognition of the need to provide a better curriculum framework for students, recognition of the opportunities that can be realized through province-wide testing, and the opportunities a standard report card can bring so that we all understand the achievements of students across this province.

These quality initiatives the minister has introduced I believe strongly will provide students and teachers with the skill sets they need to move ahead, not only as professionals but as students within their academic careers. They're certainly initiatives that will allow parents to better understand how their child is progressing through the school system. In my opinion, it will encourage our children to reach higher and develop skills they need to succeed.

The introduction of Bill 160 is about taking the next step. As I mentioned, we have seen numerous reports, studies and commissions on education in this province, and we are moving into the next step of reforming that system effectively.

The proposed legislation would help ensure a smooth transition primarily in three areas: by improving the governance of schools — I think as we look we will recall that we dealt with many of the school board issues through Bill 104; this is the next logical phase of that to provide for a smoother transition with the amalgamating boards and jurisdictions — and we continue to look at every opportunity for increasing the involvement of parents, and opportunities for simplifying and making the education system more accountable from a financial perspective.

This bill has resulted from many months of hard work, and I want to take the time to recognize the work of many people who have contributed to that bill, particularly those people at the Education Improvement Commission, those people within the ministry who liaised with the commission on a regular basis, and the representatives of school boards who have provided assistance and advice as well.

It's always more important to bring some real life application to this issue, and that experience is best presented by teachers and educators themselves. My colleague from Brampton North shared with me a letter from a public school principal today. While there are concerns raised in terms of implementation and management of change, there is general agreement with the theme of putting students first, which as I said at the outset, no one in this Legislature, I doubt, would argue.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): That's like motherhood.

Mr Smith: Yes, that is a motherhood statement, I would say to the member for Algoma. As I mentioned at the outset, I had the pleasure of being in central Algoma last week to spend some time with students and teachers in that area. I must say that the teachers I met with on the elementary side had a great deal of information and input in terms of the effectiveness of new curriculum initiatives, the effectiveness of implementing a new, standardized report card.

It certainly was beneficial in terms of receiving their input and viewpoints on how we move ahead into the next phase. That's the challenge that lies before us. As I indicated at the outset, this bill represents the next phase of education reform for this province, and a large part of that implementation will require the expertise of teaching professionals across this province.

The member for Brampton North's letter continues to recognize the achievements of the new curriculum the minister has introduced for grades 1 to 8, and other quality initiatives that have been presented by the government to date.

1520

There are some positive indicators coming back from teachers across this province, ones that I think will serve well because, as I said earlier, they are the deliverers, the front-line people who will be dealing directly with the initiatives of the government.

The objective as well is obviously to bring quality initiatives to the forefront and that's a very large part of the initiatives to date, as I've alluded to earlier. This bill recognizes that student achievement generally increases with the amount of time spent with teachers in the classroom. It paves the way for a smooth transfer of administration, a more accountable and streamlined system. The bill requires fair funding of school boards and calls for review of the funding system, a review that would challenge and examine to ensure the standards of fairness are being met in terms of the expectations of our new financing model.

The minister, who spoke earlier about parental involvement and his discussions with parents across the province, has clearly indicated that we want to bring, through this bill, a system that's more accountable to parents and one that looks for their continued involvement in the career paths and education paths of their children.

The bill itself is obviously to some extent controversial for some, but I tend to look more positively to the opportunities, and I think, by and large, people are starting to look more positively to the opportunities that are being presented.

I would refer to the Kitchener-Waterloo Record: "A high school teacher and parent, Bob Bonisteel, says, 'Snobelen's education overhaul is long overdue.' The father of two, who has taught 27 years in the Ottawa area, states: 'Finally we've got a government that means business. We are performing in an okay fashion and it costs too much money for an okay system of education.'"

There is the recognition, as I said at the outset, that we can pursue opportunities to better the system. There are good things happening in education in this province. I find one of the frustrating things about that is that some of the good new things are not being shared to the extent one might think. They may happen locally, within an individual school, they may happen within a specific school board, they may happen regionally, but very often we do not hear about the success stories that are occurring. This bill, as well as the initiatives the Minister of Education has undertaken to date, will complement those things to ensure we can continue to build upon those success stories in the future.

Some tough decisions had to be made, tough decisions that previous governments, for whatever reason, chose not to act upon, tough decisions that in my opinion will better the education system of this province, and tough decisions that need to be acted upon now.

Now is the time to act, and I welcome and support the comments of the Minister of Education and Training this afternoon. I support Bill 160 and believe strongly that as we move ahead into the next phase of education reform in this province, by putting the kids and students of this province first we will have in the long term and in the short term the quality education system we expect in this province.

Mrs Helen Johns (Huron): It's a great opportunity today to be speaking about Bill 160 and I would like to say how pleased I am to be able to speak to this issue. I think I'm one of maybe 12 people who sit in this House who has kids in the elementary school system in Ontario. I, as a parent, am very pleased with the changes that are happening in the education system. I would first like to give my thanks to Minister Snobelen for the work he has done on both bills and then to thank everyone for the consultation that has gone on over the past period of time.

From the perspective of the people who are watching today and my colleagues here, it's important to know I'm very concerned about education and about my children and the way the environment around them works. That's one of the reasons I chose to try to become elected in the last provincial election. I'm concerned when there's debt and we're mortgaging our children in the future. I'm also concerned about the hope and opportunities for our children.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Did you speak out against the tax cut?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Kingston and The Islands, order.

Mrs Johns: I think it's important that we recognize that there are a few things that are very important to the betterment of our children in Ontario. Of course a strong economy for students to be able to get jobs is important, as is an education that will allow them to compete in an ever-changing world.

I know that when I graduated some 20-odd years ago, and that's probably being very kind to myself, the opportunities were a lot more open. There were a lot of things I could do within the province of Ontario. Today, my children are going to compete in a global marketplace. They are going to have to be able to compete against people throughout the world for very different jobs, technological jobs, different jobs that I wouldn't have even dreamed about competing for 20 years ago. It's very important that we consider, when we're looking at educational reform, putting our kids first.

The first thing I'd like to say is that with my kids in the education system today, the teachers my kids have are doing an excellent job. They spend time with kids. They try and do creative things that allow kids not only to think in the logical terms that I did in past years but also to consider new and interesting environments that we never had the option to consider in the past. I think it's important.

I want to say that over the summertime I hired a high school student who had just graduated from South Huron District High School. He worked in my office for the summer and he was the top graduate out of the high school in my area. One of the things I noticed about him that I can say was not the same for myself when I graduated was how well-rounded he was. He had done a number of things that I had never considered: community involve-

ment; political involvement, I might say; helped work with the federal Tories during the federal election. I'm not saying that you have to be involved with a political party or with the Conservative Party. Don't get me wrong here. But I think, on the other side, a well-rounded group of young individuals is very important for us to have and I was very proud of him. He took independent thoughts and processes and worked through to, I think, a very successful conclusion in the items that he worked through in my riding.

This has happened in my riding despite a very tough education system for the county of Huron. The county of Huron in the past has had a very low education property tax base and as a result of that, we've spent approximately $5,000 per student a year on their education. What has happened in the province since we started with this, what I consider an ill-devised property tax system, was that we created a system where we had two tiers of education. The kids in my community were being educated on $5,000 a year and the kids in some communities were being educated on $9,000 a year.

What I would like to say to that is, I don't believe money is everything in education. I'm the first person to say that in my community there are a lot of things that are different than if you're educated in Toronto or Ottawa. But on the other side, $4,000 per pupil is a computer; $4,000 per pupil is textbooks, it's a speech therapist. All of those things are very important and have led to a two-tiered education system in Huron county.

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): Check your numbers.

Mrs Johns: I'd like to say to the member for Oriole that even Sean Conway admits that the system has been a two-tiered system for a long time. The Liberals are admitting that. Maybe it's because you were just elected that you don't understand that this has been happening in the community. But the member from Renfrew in his dissertation a couple of weeks ago said that this was a very admirable thing the government was trying to do, that other governments just hadn't had the political will to move forward with it.

I'm very pleased that this government had decided that equity and fairness in education are the most important things, and that's what's going to happen with my kids in my system. I'm very pleased about this. I'm very pleased with respect to the financial reform that's involved in this bill, and I think that kids in my riding are going to have a more equitable educational level compared to other people within the province.

1530

We are not in this world here to say that some kids deserve more dollars spent on them in education than others. Every child deserves to be educated. Yes, that is a motherhood statement, but let me say first that I am a mother and I make motherhood statements, and second, if that's motherhood, that's what I believe in: fairness, equity in the education system.

I'd like to take a minute and talk about the curriculum. I am a big fan of this new curriculum. I have a little boy in grade 1 who is an interesting little guy and he's going to have some difficult times with structure in grade 1. There's no question about that. The new curriculum says some very important things that I think parents would be very interested in when they are dealing with their elementary school children. For example, the overall expectation for the first time is that kids will read by the end of grade 1.

I think the kids should be able to read by then. They should be able to read aloud in a way that allows them to communicate. They should be able to read independently, express clear responses. I think it's important that we aspire to those goals for our children, so we should put them down, we should make teachers and students and parents accountable to those goals and we should work as hard as we can to ensure that they meet these goals. We are the province that spends the most money on education and it should be a results-oriented education.

When we talk about writing in grade 1, I'd also like to say that my little boy should be able to communicate ideas for specific purposes. He should be able to write simple sentences. As a parent, I believe that those are the things he should be able to do by the end of grade 1.

We talk about number sense. Math is my little baby, I have to tell you this. He has to be able to understand whole numbers. He has to be able to add numbers together. He has to be able to understand the concept of sequencing: two, four, six, eight, as opposed to just being able to go through the numbers. I think those are all admirable things we should be demanding of our teachers, of our students and of our families for our children.

I also noticed that we have measurement expectations for these children. They have to be able to demonstrate an understanding of and an ability to apply measurement terms. My little boy came home the other day and had to be able to figure out his height, his weight. I have to admit he had to do it in kilograms and centimetres and I had a really tough time trying to help him with it, but I think it's important for them to be able to do that.

He also has to be able to solve problems related to day-to-day environments using concrete experiences. He has to be aware of shapes and sizes. All these are things that parents expect their grade 1 students to be able to do. With this curriculum document, where we can compare what students are doing to where they should be, what the expectations of education are, I know that parents are feeling much more comfortable about the system. We've been sending this curriculum out to parents with the grades their children are in as they call and they have really thought this was an excellent idea and that it met more of the goals the parents had with respect to educating their children.

I want to talk a little bit about class size. I have a little boy in grade 3. As I have watched over the short time he has been in elementary school, I have seen class sizes growing and growing. I think that especially in early elementary school years there needs to be an ability for children to have a relationship with their teacher. For example — and because I'm down here, sometimes I talk to my kids on the phone every day as opposed to seeing

them like most lucky parents do — I say to them, "So, did you read today in school?" Before I was so lucky to have this position, I used to go into the school and read with some of the kids who were having trouble in reading. The class sizes are getting too big for teachers to be able to read to students and we need to be able to bring that class size down.

One of the interesting things I have seen as I have watched this, and as a parent it's hard to understand what is happening here — in the backgrounder that went out it says: "Currently class sizes are larger than the number of teachers would indicate. In the elementary grade, there is one teacher for every 17 students, but average class size is 25." That means, and I have thought about this, some teachers aren't in the classroom. They are doing other things outside of the classroom. I don't think there is anything more important in a school than being with the children. From my standpoint of other items that teachers might be doing, I want them with my kids, helping them to learn to read, write and do arithmetic. We can't continue to run a system where kids aren't getting teacher contact all the time. We need to change the system to make it such that the average size is a more realistic size that allows kids to be taught.

I'd also like to talk about teachers in the classroom. Because my kids are only in the elementary system right now, I have not been in the high school system, I haven't seen the ability of the high school system, but a couple of years ago my husband and I had a foreign student who came to stay with us for a year from Germany. She was in the high school system, so I have a little bit of knowledge about this but I haven't had firsthand knowledge, so I have to say my expertise here is more, granted, by the Ministry of Education. As we have all agreed here, because I seem to be provoking some thought, we need to have teachers in the classroom. I see no reason why the average teacher in the high school system spends 3.75 hours in the classroom when the average across the rest of Ontario is 4.5 hours. I think we need to get to the point where the principal job of people in the education system is contact with kids.

One of the things that has really become a good thing in my riding and maybe we were forerunners in it — I admit my board has done some terrific things as they've moved forward — is parent advisory councils. When I was on the first education bill, we heard from a lot of parent advisory councils who were involved in greater roles with their kids in the school system. I think all of us would admit that there is a role for parents in the system. The last thing I want to know at the end of the year is that something has gone awry with my child during that year. I want to be able to work with the teachers. I want to be able to work with my child. I want continually to be able to provide a second source of information to help the teachers. I think there is a big role for parent advisory councils within our school system.

My parent advisory council doesn't only want to be a fund-raiser. They want to decide about things that are happening in their school system. They want to talk about discipline. They want to talk about changing morals and values in the school system. They have had people come and talk to them about how they can better be part of the education system. I went to talk to them about the previous education bill for an evening to try and help parents decide where their children are going and what they need to have. There has to be a greater role for the parent advisory council, and this bill does that.

When I was on the education bill, one of the groups I found the most interesting, and I know a number of us were on this — I think it was in Windsor — was a parent advisory council which had really become involved in the school. I think it was the previous member from Windsor — in the new head of the Education Improvement Commission's riding. They had really got involved with parent involvement and responsibilities within the school system and they were truly amazing. Parents want to be involved. Gone are the days when we want to drop our kids off at the school door and pick them up at the end of the day. Gone are the days when we want to just hear at the end what the report card says. A number of us, and I speak for almost all people in my generation, do a lot with their kids that my parents were unable to do. We run between hockey arena, baseball diamond, soccer field. We do a lot of things with our kids, and I want to be involved with them in their school system. So I think providing a greater role for parent advisory councils is the right thing to do in this day and age. I think it's going to provide a far greater breadth to the parents and the students within the area.

1540

The last thing that makes me very happy about our movement in education is standardized testing. For many years I have heard some really nice things about my kids, and I've heard parents hearing nice things about their kids when they got their report cards home. It's nice to know my child has a good personality — I don't want to rave about my child today — and it's nice to know he interacts well with other people, but I also want to know how he's doing compared to other kids in his class. Maybe that's because I'm a competitive individual, and maybe that's a bad thing, but on the other side, my child is going to have to compete when it comes to getting a job in Ontario, when it comes to getting into university, when it comes to everything. We all had to compete to get these seats we have here today that we're so lucky to represent. So I think it's important for us to know how our kids are doing.

With that information parents will do a lot of things. Some parents will say, "That's fine, I'm not interested." Other parents will say, "I'm going to spend some time with little Johnny or Jarrett at night on that specific issue." Other parents will bring in tutors. Other parents will do whatever it takes to be able to help their children along. Parents deserve to know how their kids are doing. Standardized testing at three, six, along the line to allow parents to know what their kids are doing I think is an excellent opportunity for parents to once again become involved with their children.

I think everything we have done, every movement we've tried to make has been well-thought-out. There has been consultation on those issues. We have looked care-

fully to see how we can put the student first. It is very important for us to look at this and to say: "This is an opportunity for our kids in the future. This provides us with an even funding base for our children. It provides us with limited class size. It provides us with more teacher hours in the classroom." All of these things are important to our kids getting a big hand up when it comes to education.

It's time for us to move forward with this bill and to look at alternatives we can do to make the system even better. I'm not saying that we do this in isolation; I'm saying we do it in conjunction with teachers, principals, parents and students, because at some levels, especially at the high school level, students are able to give some input into what they think should happen. For example, my husband believes that after grade 13 we should poll these students and ask them: What could have been better in education? How could you have had better teaching methods? These young people are better able to tell us how the system works than some of the people outside, and I think we need to follow through with this. Accountability and fairness are the key to the education system being what we need for our kids in the future.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank John Snobelen, the Minister of Education, and his parliamentary assistant, Bruce Smith, for the work they've done on these two bills. I'd like to say I'm proud to be associated with a government that is moving forward with a fair and equitable system in education. I think our kids will thank us in the long run.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Gerretsen: Let it never be said in this House again that the opposition isn't speaking to the actual bill because, quite frankly, what the minister, the parliamentary assistant and the last member talked about had precious little to do with the bill.

They talk in generalities about accountability, about being concerned for education and putting children first. Who would be against any of that? Nobody. But the other thing people aren't for is for the Minister of Education to take $530 million out of education already and for the other $1 billion that he's going to take out as a result of this bill. Why don't we talk about that for a while? Why didn't the member mention that?

Parent advisory councils: Sure, there should be greater involvement of parents in schools, but how about talking about the reduced roles of school boards? School boards are going to have no say whatsoever. There's no funding say, no say whatsoever. We are looking at school boards that are so large you wonder why anybody would want to serve on some of these boards when the new trustees have to travel anywhere from three to four hours to get to a particular meeting. Why don't we talk about that?

Class sizes: Why don't you just come forward and say what you want these class sizes to be? They could be larger or they could be smaller than they currently are. There's nothing in this bill about that.

To talk in very general terms about how important education is, everybody would agree with that, but let's talk about what's in this bill. This bill is about cutting $1 billion out of education in addition to the $530 million you've already cut. If everybody is so happy about it, how come the teachers aren't happy? They are the ones who are in touch with our kids on a day-to-day basis in schools. I say shame on all of you.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): I do feel sorry for the poor public who might be watching this, who are being force-fed this Pablum, this grub on a daily basis. I do feel badly because I'm here listening and, I tell you, it's hard to take.

They have eviscerated funding for school boards ever since they took office. You have heard the members for Huron and Middlesex and the minister not comment at all, or barely, on Bill 160. Why? Because they are either ashamed of their own bill or too afraid to talk about its contents. That's why they're not speaking to this bill. By and large, they talk about equity as if somehow these people have become the new champions of equity. Good God. These are the people who are widening the gap between the rich and the poor and they talk about equity.

Mrs Johns: Does $9,000 widen the gap?

Mr Marchese: These people, the member for Huron included, are centralizing control and decentralizing the burden down to the municipal level, in this case boards of education. They talk about putting a cap on class size. We don't even know what those grants are going to be for the boards. I tell you, everybody is quivering with fear. They are quivering because they know they're not going to get what these people are talking about. They're taking the power away from local boards to determine local needs.

The member for Huron must know that needs are as different in cities as they are in some other part of Ontario. She must surely know that. She must surely know that we're not all equal in society. God knows, I wish it were so, but we are not equal. This member pretends to create this illusion that all these kids across Ontario are equal. They're not. That's why boards have had the ability in the past, but no longer, to achieve that equality that they are destroying.

Mr Caplan: I'm very pleased to reply to some of the statements that were made earlier by the minister, the member for Middlesex and the member for Huron. There are an amazing number of inaccuracies in the comments. One comment was to a $9,000 figure as opposed to a $5,000 figure. I would suggest to the member she check her facts. In fact it's way out. If this is just propaganda and spin to sell something, which quite frankly is unsaleable to the people of Ontario, I say shame — shame on the member, shame on this government.

The whole issue around class size is a very interesting one. The member, and all the members, should know that there is legislative protection for class sizes of 8 to 1, of 12 to 1. They are special education classes. So if you're looking for the teachers, I suggest that's where you find them, because they are there. They are in front of students. I ask the members and I ask this minister, is he going to get rid of special education protection for our kids? Are

they any less deserving? I certainly hope that's not the response.

As far as this new curriculum and standardized testing, I can tell the member that as a parent in North York, I want nine grades of standardized testing, not the three that this government is proposing. Why don't we raise the level to what we have? Why, as a parent, do I have to have less for my child? The member cannot answer this. The members have no reply as to why now we only have to have three grades of standardized testing.

Why did the Minister of Education virtually plagiarize a curriculum that was introduced five years ago in North York? I don't have any problem with that. It's a good starting place, but it's not a finished product. We can do much better.

1550

Mr Wildman: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the remarks of the three leadoff speakers for the Conservative government.

I really was surprised and disappointed in the presentation, as the minister is wont to say from time to time. The fact is, these three speakers made presentations which have nothing to do with the real world in education.

What we have today in this province, unfortunately, thanks to the moves made by this government, including Bill 160, is a crisis that is about to happen. We may see a major disruption in the classes of students across this province because the government is determined to take a significant amount of money out of education, $1 billion over the $500 million they've already taken —

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Wildman: They can barrack all they want, but the point is they are prepared to sacrifice the quality of education for kids in this province in order to get the money out. It reminds me of that Hollywood movie where the athlete is always yelling, "Show me the money." Mr Snobelen is being continually yelled at by the Treasurer of Ontario, "Show me the money," and he's going to get him the money. He's going to get that money out no matter what. If it means ending the special education programs, if it means gutting ESL programs, if it means hurting class size, if it means laying off teachers, he'll do it, because he's got to get that money for Mr Eves.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Middlesex, are you going to sum up?

Mr Smith: Certainly you can approach this issue from two perspectives: one such as the opposition, where they're creating all sorts of chaos, or alternatively approaching the issue as constructive managers of change. This is what we're about. This is a process that we're entering into. I said at the outset that it's not an easy process we're going through, but one that I believe in the long term will benefit the students of this province.

The issue that the member for Kingston and The Islands raised in terms of the $1 billion: I would simply put this matter before you. Last year the government clearly articulated its intention to reduce grants to school boards by 2.4%. That is well known. Instead of finding savings, many school boards simply passed the reductions on to local taxpayers. In essence, they raised taxes $334 million.

That is why there has to be change to the funding system of this province. That is why we're moving ahead to provide a simpler, fairer funding system for the province, one that clearly focuses on students.

You can approach it from a panicked perspective, as the members of the opposition are, or you can deal with it progressively and move ahead. Many of these opposition members were a part of previous governments that have studied this issue to death. As I indicated before, now is the time to act; now is the time to move ahead.

We will be limiting class size. We will be focusing on teachers' expertise in the classroom. We will be addressing student access to specialists. We will provide more time for learning. We'll be providing a simpler, fairer funding model. We will be recognizing free collective bargaining and that whole process. We will be recognizing the needs of those communities that are experiencing growth opportunities.

This is not about panicking about the future and standing up and railing and screaming. It's about doing things properly, things that each of these members on the opposition benches knows has been appropriately discussed for a number of years — some 22 different studies spanning an extensive period of time. The time has come for some changes. Yes, there will be some challenges with that change process. I challenge them to take the appropriate approach.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): This government continues to be absolutely amazing in its sheer bullheadedness and its determination to ram through its agenda regardless of the consequences. It continues to manipulate public opinion in an effort to camouflage the fact that the basic agenda remains unchanged.

We hear today that they may even have managed to convince members like the member for Middlesex and the member for Huron, who I think have some genuine concern for education, that this government's goal is to see some improvement of education. How they can continue to believe that I think is only because they are taught not to look at the evidence of this government's record to date and they are taught not to look at the reality of what is actually happening out in the classroom.

Be that as it may, we are beginning debate today on an education omnibus bill. It is a bill that serves one overall purpose. Let there be no mistake about that. That is to give this Mike Harris government total and absolute control of education in every respect, from funding to the day-to-day activities that go on in a classroom — total control.

This is a bill that has driven the teachers of this province to the point of being ready to take strike action in defence not only of their jobs but of public education itself. This is a bill that is the result of neither negotiation nor consultation. You can't call it consultation when one side comes into the talks with an agenda which is already set in stone, an agenda which is diametrically opposed to everything the other party to the talks believes is impor-

tant. Yet that is exactly what happened when Mike Harris and John Snobelen said, "We want to talk to teachers." They came in with a set agenda, and it was an agenda that no teacher concerned about education could ever subscribe to.

You can't talk about negotiation when one side sets down ultimatums. That's again what Mike Harris and John Snobelen and the representatives of their government did at that so-called negotiating table. They made their ultimatum absolutely clear: They wanted $1 billion out of education spending and they wanted the tools to cut those dollars out by cutting out classroom teachers. No wonder teachers said no.

Last Thursday, Mike Harris and John Snobelen were still talking about talking. You'd think if they were serious about talking, if the Minister of Education was serious, as he said in the House today, about sitting down with teachers and actually hearing their concerns, we wouldn't be beginning debate today on a bill which is going to force teachers into strike action across this province.

You'd wonder why not only are we beginning debate today, but this bill is being fast-tracked: debate tonight, debate tomorrow night, debate Wednesday night. On Thursday are we going to see a time allocation motion that cuts off debate? How soon are we going to see second reading? How much opportunity is there going to be for any kind of public consultation on this bill?

Why is this debate beginning? Why is it being debated today? Why is it being fast-tracked? It is clearly an in-your-face response, despite the seemingly conciliatory words that the Premier was using last week and the Minister of Education was using today. Why, I ask you, would this government keep pushing this province's 126,000 teachers to the point where strike action, an action which teachers truly do not want to take, remains their only form of protest against government actions which they consider absolutely indefensible, inexcusable and unacceptable?

There is one answer. The answer is that the government really does need the money for their tax cut. John Snobelen promised Mike Harris that he could deliver more than $1 billion for the tax cut agenda. Mike has said publicly that he needs the $1 billion, and he sent John Snobelen out to find $1 billion for him.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Hamilton Mountain, you must withdraw that.

Mr Trevor Pettit (Hamilton Mountain): I withdraw it.

1600

Mrs McLeod: If you are going to take $1 billion out of education, you do have to do things very differently, as the Minister of Education keeps telling us, but you've got to read something into the "very differently." When this Minister of Education talks about doing education very differently, he's not talking about constructive change for the benefit of students in the classroom. When this Minister of Education is talking about doing things very differently, read for that "very cheaply," because that's what every single initiative of this government has been about.

If you're going to do things very differently and very cheaply, you need to persuade people that the system is so bad that you've got to break it before you can change it. That's the kind of change management that John Snobelen, the Minister of Education, knows best. It's the kind of change management he believes in: "Break down the system, destroy what's there now, and then you can do whatever you want to do without any resistance whatsoever. You have total power, total control. You have the tools to find the $1 billion." That's what this bill is all about, giving John Snobelen the tools he needs.

You'll remember, Mr Speaker, and I'm sure my colleagues will, that John Snobelen promised school boards a toolkit about a year or a year and a half ago. But all the tools he was able to deliver, he found, were to make a direct cut to junior kindergarten classes — the Minister of Education again today and the Premier said they hadn't cut junior kindergarten; this government looked for $145 million in direct cuts to junior kindergarten, and that was something they could control — and they made a direct hit on adult education, cut the funding for adult education to half, and that was something within their control. But Mr Snobelen found that he didn't have the other tools that he needed within his control, so he couldn't deliver the toolkit to school boards. This bill, Bill 160, is the long-promised toolkit. All the tools are there, but they're not tools for school boards to use; they are tools that are vested to be used solely and exclusively by cabinet, by Mike Harris and by John Snobelen. This is total control of education by the central government.

Because John Snobelen needed to destroy the traditional system to get the tools he needed for himself, John Snobelen has been deliberately picking a fight with Ontario's teachers from the time he became Minister of Education. Teachers and trustees, in my view, have been guardians of public education. Teachers and trustees have had their differences at local levels from time to time — there's no question about that — but I believe that teachers and trustees have always shared a belief in public education, a commitment to work for it, to fight for it, to make sure that the actions that were taken, even when there were differences about which actions were most appropriate, were taken to preserve and enhance public education and an equality of educational opportunity for our students. I believe that about teachers and trustees. They are guardians of public education and have been so for over 100 years.

Mr Snobelen, our Minister of Education, describes them not as guardians of public education but as defenders of the status quo. These are the people who are committed to education, committed to make education work on the front lines, in classrooms, with students, but they do resist changes they see as being destructive for public education — of course they're going to resist those changes — so they are opposed to this government's destructive agenda, and because they are opposed to it, they have to go. The first to go with Bill 104, just a few months ago, were the province's school trustees, rendered absolutely ineffective and non-accountable at the local level, as we soon will

see. Now, with Bill 160, it is the other partners in guardianship of public education who are under attack; it's the province's teachers.

In the past year teachers have been demeaned by this Minister of Education as being underworked and overpaid. They have been accused of laziness because they failed to take the minister's rather hastily put together summer seminars on the elementary school curriculum, even though only a handful of teachers could have been admitted. They have been portrayed as wasting time that could be spent with students. The minister has now shown how eager he is to replace qualified teachers with non-certified non-teachers in a host of areas, from guidance to libraries to art to music to physed to technology.

But the minister hasn't stopped there. He has consistently undervalued the work the teachers do and he has maligned the public education system itself. He portrays our students as underachieving while the system itself consumes 10% more than the national average across the rest of the country. The Premier actually said in the House a week or so ago that our students were 10th and last in achievement. The Premier had that mixed up with post-secondary education funding, where indeed we are 10th and last. That is not a reflection on the achievement of our students, which is really quite different from what the Minister of Education describes, and even the figures on Ontario spending versus the national average are completely erroneous. But John Snobelen will say whatever it takes to persuade people that the system is broken.

I think the government has been a little bit surprised at how much resistance there has been to the agenda, despite all their efforts to discredit their opponents, so the government has had to at least give the appearance of stepping back on some of their proposals. They're finding that people are a lot more committed to public education than they realized. They have had to launch a $1-million advertising campaign to try and sell their spin. Talk to parents who are concerned about education and they'll tell you what they would have liked to have done to really improve education if they could have spent that $1 million themselves. But that was the government's attempt to try and spin their agenda, to try and convince people they were doing something to improve education. They have had to refocus their attacks at the last minute so they can try and isolate the issues to ones they think they can manage when they find the public isn't supportive of their agenda, so now they are trying to focus their attack on teacher preparation time. I'll get to that later.

But make no mistake. The basic agenda of this government is the same and it is unchanging: The government wants the control that will let them take another $1 billion out of education.

I want to spend my time this afternoon trying to unravel the web of misinformation and myth that John Snobelen and Mike Harris have spun to try and create the impression that this bill is about something else.

The first myth is that this bill is about improving education. The title of the bill — the government tries to convince us with their titles — is the Education Quality Improvement Act. There is nothing in this bill that will ensure any improvement in education. All this bill is is a set of tools to give the power to the minister and to the cabinet to decide what will happen in education. It doesn't tell us how they're going to use those powers, how they're going to use those tools; it just gives them the power.

I ask, do we trust this Minister of Education, this Premier and this government to actually use those powers to improve education for our students? If you have any doubts about the answer to that question, just look at the evidence of this government's record: $533 million in direct cuts after having made the social contract cuts permanent, a total of almost $1 billion already taken out of education on a permanent basis; direct hits, as I have suggested, to junior kindergarten, where they wanted the $145 million in savings; direct hits to adult education; and direct hits to school boards' ability to provide support for the programs that matter, because they have made cuts in the operating grants to school boards. So we have seen larger class sizes, we have seen less special education and we have seen schools that have no textbooks because their budgets have been cut back so far. I heard today from a principal who said, "We have absolutely no money for painting in our school," so when there is graffiti on the school walls, she goes up to the hardware store and buys a can of paint so she can spray paint to cover up the graffiti.

Class size is a big issue, a big issue for parents, a big issue for students and a big issue for teachers, so the minister, when he wants to talk about how he's going to improve education, talks a lot about class size. He talks about it as if larger class sizes — and we have seen larger class sizes, as the member for Huron has said, have seen class sizes grow in the last two years — were the fault of bad decisions made by local school boards, and the minister talks as if he's actually going to fix large class sizes. He's even suggested, and I'm still struggling with the suggestion, that teachers have gone out and negotiated increases in class sizes and he uses that as one of his reasons for attacking collective bargaining.

1610

You have to ask again, why would teachers negotiate larger class sizes? I was at negotiating tables for a lot of years on the management side as a school trustee. In my experience, the focus of those negotiations from the teachers' perspective was always to have lower class sizes, smaller classes. That served their interests as teachers in a classroom, not larger class sizes. I acknowledge that in the last year or so there have been some contracts where the teachers have very reluctantly agreed to some increase in class sizes.

Can I tell you the two examples I know about? One is my home board, the Lakehead Board of Education. Elementary school teachers agreed to have, I think it was, two additional students in their elementary school classes because that was the only way that board could save junior kindergarten. In order to keep the junior kindergarten program the teachers agreed to an increase in class size.

The other example I know about, I hate to tell the member for Algoma this, was in response to the social contract provisions which froze increments and penalized the more junior teachers in the school system. Those increments were not given and they were being paid a lower salary for essentially doing the same work as their more senior counterparts. So I know there are boards that negotiated some increase in class size in order to ensure that the junior teachers in their system could receive those increments.

Those are the only instances I know of where teachers have ever agreed at a negotiating table to larger class sizes.

Why do we actually have these larger class sizes? I suggest to you that if you're concerned about this issue you might want to look at the report of the Education Improvement Commission, which the minister himself set up. The education commission notes that between 1992 and 1997, operating grants fell by just over $1 billion. They also note that enrolment in Ontario's education systems continued to increase at an average rate of 25,000 students per year. They further note that in that same time frame the number of teachers in schools in Ontario fell by nearly 2,000 between 1992 and 1996. The equation is pretty simple: If you have less money, more students and fewer teachers, you are going to have larger class sizes.

I find it quite incredible that the minister's background statement on this bill is as deliberately naïve as it appears to be. It says, "Current class sizes are larger than the number of teachers would indicate." They go on, of course, to talk about the fact that there's a difference between the pupil-teacher ratio and the average class size, but they don't seem to want to talk about where those extra teachers are.

We know where the extra teachers are. My colleague from Oriole has spoken to it. Some of those extra teachers are in special education classes, where the ratio of teachers to students is more like 1 to 8 or 1 to 12, so that individual attention can be given. Some of those extra teachers are in libraries, working with students in libraries. Some of the extra teachers are in our secondary schools. They're in tech shops and in chemistry labs, where you cannot have higher numbers of students because it is not safe for students working with chemicals or with machinery to have larger classes.

Some of those extra teachers are in grades 1 and 2. I was proud to be part of a government that did mandate lower class sizes in grades 1 and 2, not just maximum sizes but lower class sizes in grades 1 and 2. We funded it fully so boards could implement that policy, but as the grants have been cut, trying to keep class sizes lower in grades 1 and 2 has forced boards to have more students in some of the other grades. That's the kind of dilemma that boards have faced when they've been hit by the $533 million in cuts that this government has already introduced. I remind you that these boards are also facing increasing enrolment at exactly the same time.

I suggest to this government that you cannot fix this problem without more money. Fewer teachers, more students make larger class sizes, and the only way to turn that around is to provide more funding directly for the classroom. It will make it worse if you take $1 billion out. The answer surely is not to see all those teachers, who are somehow seen as wasted outside the classroom, disappear, to have those same maximum class sizes in special education or the chemistry lab or grades 1 and 2 that you might see as being a realistic average in the other grades. Surely that won't be the minister's answer to managing class sizes. But until we see from this minister some clear evidence that the dollars are going to be there to provide for the lowering of class sizes, I suggest that his concern about improving the quality of education is entirely hollow.

We would also suggest that the minister's concern about improving the quality of education is entirely hollow. If you want evidence of that, look at what we saw last week, where the hallmark of the minister's current educational reform was to be extending the school year so that students would have more time with their teachers. That was Monday. This was good for education, it was good for students, it would improve the quality of education. By Wednesday morning at 9:30 it wasn't good for kids or education any longer, so the minister decided that he wasn't going to do it.

This is a minister making up our children's educational future as he goes along. How can something be good for kids on Monday and not good for them on Wednesday? It's because at no time has this Minister of Education actually asked what works for students, what is good for students, what will actually improve the quality of education. The basic goal is, if you can get more work out of teachers for less money, you're going to save the dollars you're looking for to get that $1 billion. Will they even care that everyone, anyone, who knows anything about education says that what they're proposing isn't actually good for students?

I'm going to have to hurry up here because I have no less than some seven myths that this government has tried to spin as a justification for this act. The second myth is that the changes in education are needed because our students are doing so badly. Nobody is going to argue that there can be changes that would indeed improve education. Nobody is going to argue that we don't want our students to achieve excellence. Nobody is going to argue against having equity in funding so that every student has a chance. There's no quarrel with that. But I will quarrel over and over again with a minister who takes joy in putting the achievement of our students in the worst possible light, who loves to use the international test results to suggest that our students are doing badly.

Why does the minister never talk about the fact that our students were actually ahead of the United States and Germany in math and science? Germany is always being held up as the example of how effective a streamed system can be, and yet our students were ahead in math and science. Why does the minister never mention that we have a much larger number of students who are being tested than in many other countries because we don't stream out the

less academically able, we put them all into a program and we allow them all to be tested and meet a standard.

Why does he never, ever discuss the implication of the fact that in Ontario only 70% of the students who were tested speak English at home? That's lower than in any other province, even BC, with a large immigrant population. In BC, 86% of the students tested spoke English at home. Why doesn't the minister want to talk about the fact that Ontario students performed at the national average or better in measuring and solving problems but have difficulty describing the procedures verbally? It's a verbal problem that some Ontario students had. Does the fact that 30% of our students have English as a second language make that more understandable? Does it explain why some of our students don't do as well in the overall scores? I don't think the minister wants to talk about that, because he doesn't want to enhance understanding; he wants proof that the system is broken.

It is a fact that Ontario's grade 4 students came second among a handful of jurisdictions on international tests that even met the test standards for that grade and that our grade 8 students were slightly above the international average. But that, although it was recently reported, didn't get any headlines and it certainly didn't get any comment from the minister. How well do our students have to do before the Minister of Education stops saying that the system is broken, and when will he look at what the real needs are and what needs to be done? I suggest that it is likely to be never, because then he would have to leave his cost-cutting and political agenda behind.

Despite everything that this minister has done to discredit education and our students' achievement, the recent study by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education still shows that the public believes that education is doing a good job. Ontario residents are more satisfied than they were a decade ago with education: 60% of parents are happy with the system, and two thirds of adults under 25, the products of the system of the last 10 years, felt the schools were doing well.

1620

Myth number three that is offered up as an excuse for this legislation is that the government needs to get hold of teacher preparation time because the time teachers spend on preparation is wasted time, so by extension, if we take that wasted time away from teachers, education is necessarily going to improve.

I would ask the most basic question about this myth: If you want to save money by taking away preparation time — and the Minister of Education has said he thinks he can save at least $200 million by taking away preparation time — you're going to have to have fewer teachers; it's the only way you can save the money. The estimates are that to do what the minister wants it will be 6,000 to 10,000 fewer teachers in our system. The basic question then is, if you have fewer teachers teaching more classes, how does this improve the quality of education? How does it improve the amount of contact time teachers have with students? It doesn't; it lowers the quality of education.

The second question is, is teacher preparation time good for teachers or good for students? You have to then ask, what are teachers doing with their preparation time? One thing is that they're covering sick leaves. If the minister is going to get a saving, he's going to have to look at that, because there's not going to be as much saving if you have to bring in occasional teachers to replace the coverage the teachers are now doing. But I suggest that more occasional teachers aren't really good for kids.

The second thing teachers are doing with their preparation time is that they're preparing their lessons and they're doing their marking. That's a reality. Then they use the time after school and in the evenings that has been freed up because they've done their marking and their preparation during that preparation time, that after-4 time and that evening time, to coach the basketball team, to provide support to the student council, to work with the drama class, a whole host of extracurricular activities. Surely this government doesn't believe those extracurricular activities are a waste and should be eliminated as a part of the school curriculum, yet I certainly hear the back-to-the-basics folks prepared to give all that up as extra, as frills, as a waste of taxpayers' money. I don't think students and parents will share that view.

This Minister of Education has actually tried to portray all the time spent outside the classroom as being a waste of dollars. Remember when he talked about the $6 billion not spent in the classrooms as if that $6 billion was all spent on administration that could be cut and shaved so that we'd save $6 billion? He didn't acknowledge the fact that the $6 billion included light, heat, maintenance, special education and counselling of kids. Surely all of that is not waste, but it does give you some idea of what the minister thinks is valuable. I heard the member for Huron, indoctrinated in that view, trying to suggest that the only value comes from the teacher in a classroom. Absolutely that is key, that teacher in the classroom, but you've also got to have the full curriculum and the kind of support that the out-of-classroom time provides.

It worries me when we have a government that thinks the teachers only work four hours a day, which is what the minister's friend, Mr Paroian, whom he referred to again, has suggested. Teachers are working outside the classroom when they are spending time with students. I for one consider that to be valuable and important work which should continue.

I'm not going to linger on the preparation time issue. I'm not going to read all the quotations that have come from trustees who believe that preparation time is an essential part of the day. I do want to express my concern that the education information commission — I'm sorry, the Education Improvement Commission; I keep getting that wrong — the Education Improvement Commission suggests that maybe 25% of preparation time could be taken away, and the minister is determined to take at least 50% of that preparation time away. I'm going to ignore the fact that the commission says to allow that time to be used flexibly at the local level and this minister is going to control it entirely from the centre. I'm not going to spend a

lot of time on the fact that we are already at the national average — the minister likes to say he's taking us down to the national average in preparation time too — because in Ontario teachers are providing coverage for other teachers who are away.

I just want to express my concern that I think this minister's goal is to use his power to take away all teacher preparation time, to force teachers to be in the classroom the whole time, the whole part of their school day, and that if there is no preparation time left at all, what will be lost in the balance of the day, with the voluntary commitment of teachers after school and at nights, is not going to serve students well.

Myth number four is that the government needs to take control of spending and take taxing powers away from local boards because boards have overspent and have raised taxes. We've heard that argument from the member for Middlesex today.

In this bill, as I trust everybody is now aware, the government is taking over the power to tax property directly. It's going to be very interesting to see how the public feels about the provincial government having the powers to tax property directly for education once they see the uniform mill rate the government is going to impose for residential taxes. We know they're taking 50% of the residential tax burden for education away, but as they download all the other services on to municipalities and apply a uniform mill rate for the other 50% that's going to be raised for education, I think there will be a great many people in a great many communities who actually see their residential property tax bill go up significantly.

We don't know how they're going to tax businesses in our communities for educational purposes, businesses that have to continue to pay 100% of their share of educational costs but in this case are going to be paying it directly to the provincial government. We don't know whether that's going to be a uniform mill rate.

We don't know much about how this government is going to use this power to raise taxes directly on property for education, because I remind you that this bill is not about how this government is going to use power; this bill is only about this government taking power.

But I want to get back to the myth about whether or not we need this power being taken over by government because school boards have been overspending and overtaxing. I ask the question, why have some boards raised taxes in the last two years? Nobody who's an elected politician believes it's in their political interest to be raising taxes in this climate, so why have boards felt they were pushed to raise taxes in the last two years? It is for one simple, obvious reason: Boards of trustees who are concerned about education have had to raise taxes to make up for this government's cut to their grants, and the alternative was to cut programs and services they believe their students need.

Those boards have been desperate to find the dollars to keep junior kindergarten, to find the dollars to try to keep class sizes down so that they don't go up to 35, 38 and 40; to at least keep the class sizes down in grades 1 and 2. They've been desperate to find the dollars to meet those kinds of needs.

Some boards didn't raise taxes, and I acknowledge that. There are boards that had reserves, and last year when they were hit with this government's cuts and when they were hit with these totally untenable decisions they would not make and hurt the programs their students need, some boards went out and used those reserves. Now I think they're wishing they had raised taxes after all, because they're trapped: They can't raise taxes between January and September — the minister's new funding formula doesn't take over till September — and those boards that used their reserves last year instead of raising taxes do not know how they're going to keep their programs, including junior kindergarten, going from now until next September.

As for their spending, what have boards spent their money on? It's not administration. Let's put that myth to rest right away. Administrative spending across this province is less than 5% of the total spending of all school boards. School boards have been spending their dollars on programs that have been mandated by the province, and I will acknowledge that there have been increases in spending as new programs have been introduced by successive governments.

There have been increases in spending because of a previous Conservative government's commitment to special education. Costly? Yes. Important in terms of true equality of education for students? Absolutely.

Spending has risen in the last years because of another government's commitment to having lower class sizes in grades 1 and 2. Costly? Yes. Important in terms of a good start in the elementary grades, the primary grades? I would say absolutely.

Boards have been spending money to try to bring in the computer technology which even this minister acknowledges is crucial for modern education.

All these programs have required increased spending, and remember that we've had increased enrolment at the same time, so we've had increased spending to meet those needs of new students as well. All that has meant increased spending, but all of it has been important in meeting the needs of students.

1630

Again, I want to go back to the minister's own commission. When they recognized what — the government members don't want to take my word for this, and maybe they wouldn't, seeing me as having a vested interest as a former school trustee. But let their commission speak. This was in that period of time when operating grants fell by just over $1 billion. The commission says, "Although some of this reduction was offset by increases in the local property taxes used for education, much of it was absorbed by school boards through service cuts and streamlined operations." Boards have done their best to try and bring about the efficiencies that would allow them to avoid the service cuts.

What is going to happen then when the enrolment continues to increase, when the cuts in funding continue and when the boards cannot raise taxes because this govern-

ment has taken over the power to fund education and to raise taxes itself? What happens when local needs that are identified by local boards simply can't be met? We will lose the junior kindergartens. There's no doubt about that. We will have larger class sizes in some grades because we're not going to be able to find the dollars to meet the minister's rules by having lower class sizes in the elementary and primary grades. We're going to have even fewer textbooks for our students. We're going to have even less special education. That will be the reality of continued funding cuts. So don't tell me this bill is about improving education. This bill is about control and this bill is about cuts.

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, interestingly, found that there was no evidence of a tax revolt on the part of Ontario residents. They found that 50% of people were prepared to spend more on education and to pay higher taxes in order to fund that. I think that is a rather dangerous thing for people to want if your government is basing its entire campaign on spending cuts and tax cuts. You can't have a majority of people out there actually saying: "We want to spend more money on education. We think education's doing a good job. It's important to us. We're even prepared to pay more taxes in order to have better education."

That's not this government's agenda. No wonder they've got to do everything they can to convince that public that the education system is broken, that our students aren't doing well, that they're not getting value for their tax dollars. They've got to convince the public that their support for education is misguided, that it's this government's agenda of spending cuts and tax cuts that makes sense. They put all the emphasis on trying to prove that the system is broken so they can find some public support to go out there and take away the billion dollars in the name of having to control overspending and overtaxation.

I would love it if just one day the minister or the Premier, the Minister of Finance or even one of the government backbenchers would stand up and say, "Which of those programs that boards have spent money on in the last five years, the last 10 years, do you think should go?" The junior kindergarten program? I guess the Minister of Education has spoken to that. The lower class sizes in grades 1 or 2? Let's see what his class size maximums do to grades 1 and 2. Special education? Is that what should go? Which of the programs that have caused an increase in spending should be taken out? Which of the programs the boards have raised taxes to try and protect should the boards have cut?

Myth number six is one that I almost forgot. In fact I just put it into my notes when I heard the Minister of Education make his introductory comments. Myth number 6 is that this bill is going to provide greater local accountability. The reason I hadn't put it in my notes was that I thought that was the reason they brought in Bill 104, to provide greater accountability. I thought we'd had that debate, but I guess this government feels they've got to resurrect their old reasons when they can't come up with really good ones for introducing a new bill. This bill doesn't serve the purpose of greater accountability for education. It certainly tells us where the buck stops, because every single decision in education is going to be made at the minister's desk. Maybe that's what he means about greater accountability being served by this bill.

In terms of true accountability for education, true accountability held by local boards of trustees who can actually meet with their teachers and meet with their parents and visit their classrooms and understand what the local needs are and then make those very tough decisions, including a decision to go out and raise taxes if that's what's needed to protect public education, we don't have that kind of accountability left any longer. That has disappeared with Bill 104, which virtually removes the effectiveness of school trustees, and it disappears with this bill, which takes away any right of local school trustees to raise taxes to meet local priorities.

The accountability for education after this bill passes will be so far removed from classes and so far removed from local needs, from the reality of what's going on in our classrooms, from the real understanding of students' needs, that it truly can't be called accountability at all. In fact it will be very difficult to prove that it's the minister who is making the decisions.

We've heard him time and time again, we heard the Premier today, say the minister has never made a decision about cutting junior kindergarten. The minister cut the funding for junior kindergarten. Does that make him accountable for having to see junior kindergarten classes removed? This minister is going to bring in averages and formulas that are going to be virtually impossible to decipher, and whenever there is a problem at the local level he'll say: "It's not my problem. I'm paying for junior kindergarten. I'm paying for adult education. I've put maximum class sizes in place, for goodness' sake. What more can I do to improve the quality of education? If there's a problem, it's at the local school board level." Decentralized blame with totally centralized decision-making: that's what the president of the public school boards said about Bill 104, and Bill 160 puts it over the top.

Myth number seven is that we have to change the way teacher bargaining is done because collective bargaining doesn't work. I've left this to the last of my myths, because not even the government could get this one going very far. Teachers' collective bargaining, of course, has always been done under Bill 100; not always, but since about 1973 it's been done under Bill 100. Bill 100 is repealed in its entirety with this Bill 160. The reason they haven't been able to talk a lot about Bill 100 not working, collective bargaining for teachers not working as a reason for repealing Bill 100 and bringing in new rules for teachers' collective bargaining, the reason they haven't been able to argue it wasn't working is that it has worked: 98% of teacher contracts under Bill 100 have been settled without resort to strike or lockout. That is a record of success. Why are we changing what is clearly already

working? They can't even prove that this system is broken, but they are so determined to change it.

The Education Relations Commission, which has served the purpose on those rare occasions in which there are strikes of advising the minister when students are in jeopardy, will continue for a brief period of time to provide advice to the minister on when students are in jeopardy, but the Education Relations Commission is going to function in isolation. It's not going to be involved in the collective bargaining situation. It's not going to be involved in fact-finding or mediation, so its work on jeopardy will be done in isolation and it will be only temporary, because this bill gives the minister the ability, very shortly I suspect, to assign this responsibility to a person or an entity who will then advise the minister on whether the students' year is in jeopardy in the event of a teachers' strike.

It also incidentally gives the minister total power to give direction to that board or entity as to what he expects them to do. So much for the independence of any future body. God forbid that it should be Mr Paroian who ends up being given the responsibility for deciding whether students are in jeopardy, because we are going to see absolute chaos in the collective bargaining field between teachers and local boards over the next months.

The minister's only claim to needing to change the collective bargaining process now is that some negotiations have resulted in an increase in class size, and that's a myth I dealt with earlier.

You have to again ask a basic question. If local collective bargaining under Bill 100 has been working, why is the government wrecking it? There's no question they're wrecking it, because local collective bargaining cannot work when trustees have no financial ability to settle; local collective bargaining cannot work when significant factors of working conditions aren't on the bargaining table and aren't even within local control outside of the bargaining table. The efforts that will undoubtedly be made to make it work are undoubtedly going to fail. I'm not being a Cassandra; I'm not being a doomsayer; I'm not being a scaremonger. I've been at enough negotiating tables to know the conditions are not there for local collective bargaining to work. This government has made sure of that.

1640

Where it doesn't work and where you have to go to arbitration, the arbitrators will be handcuffed by the ability-to-pay factors introduced by the minister in an earlier bill, Bill 34. They will be handcuffed by the fact that if they should want to look at any sort of salary settlement that might involve an increase in salaries, they have to look at how many teachers would be laid off, how many programs would be reduced with the given assumption that there cannot be an increase in funding or an increase in taxation to support that. How can that be considered fair collective bargaining or fair and just arbitration?

It is not. It is government control where the government appoints the board that manages the process and controls the arbitrators by law. This government, even with all that control, has still kept the ability to prevent strikes by teachers in the transitional period. There is no doubt they need it to have some protection from the chaos that they are about to create.

My leader today has again raised the particular clauses that we have pointed out in the bill. Let there be no doubt about it, that clause 58.1(2)(q) says that, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations...for such transitional matters as the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers...advisable to prevent disruption in the education of pupils."

If you go further over, it says very clearly on page 59 of the bill, "In the event of a conflict between a regulation made under clause 58.1(2)(q)" — that very specific clause that allows the minister to step in, in the event of any concern of disruption of pupils — and a provision of this or any other act, it is the regulation that prevails.

It's a Henry VIII clause, to quote Justice Campbell, unlike anything we have ever seen before, the ability of government by regulation to override not only this act but any other act — protection they felt they needed to deal with the sheer chaos of what is going to occur in a transitional period, when this government is not only amalgamating boards but has said that every board, whether amalgamated or not, must negotiate a new contract and that those new contracts must be in place by September 1, 1998. Given the impossible conditions for local bargaining, given the requirement that every single board in the province must negotiate new contracts by September 1, 1998, there is going to be chaos, and kids will pay the price for that.

I suggest that all the reasons the minister has given to justify this bill are based on myths. Why is it here? To give total power to government to make the cuts they need to pay for the tax cut. I will say it over and over again, because that is the bottom line. That is the easiest, the most obvious explanation. It may not be the whole explanation, and that scares me too, because at some future point, once this government has its $1 billion or maybe $2 billion out of education, once they have the total control that this bill gives them, they will be able to turn that control over to parent councils through charter schools or voucher systems, and then we will almost certainly see the privatization of public education.

You have to wonder why the bill provides a number for students. Isn't it enough, if you're going to track students, to have the student's name, grade, report card? Do you need a number, or does the number make it easier to assign a funding mechanism directly to the student? The minister talks about funding going with students. When we see that, we'll see voucher systems, and when we see voucher systems, we will see the breakdown of publicly funded education that has attempted, struggled for years to provide some true equality of education for our students.

Why are statutory contracts for teachers being withdrawn in this legislation? Why are seniority lists now going to be established by boards not in negotiations but in consultation with teachers, that essentially remove the requirement for full system-wide seniority? I have to ask,

and maybe it's my cynical hat getting even more cynical, but does this make it even easier, if you don't have a requirement for system-wide seniority, to turn hiring over to parents and to school councils?

Another feature of this bill that I find horrendous is that the minister will have the power to determine who can be a teacher, who has to be a teacher to be able to teach kids. So much for the College of Teachers, which this government took such pride in establishing. It's now going to be the minister who decides who has to be a teacher in the classroom. It's an appalling idea that art and music and physical education and libraries and technology, computers, can be taught by somebody who has no understanding of pedagogy. Surely you have to know something about how to teach. Surely this should matter if you're concerned about the quality of teacher time spent with students.

I don't think that's a question the government asked itself. I think this is all about saving money. I do wonder whether or not having more teachers who are not qualified teachers, non-certified people, makes it even easier for charter schools to operate with a minimum of staff.

The future of school boards is certainly in doubt. Whether the government is ready to move immediately to privatization or whether it will just evolve as school boards essentially disappear is perhaps the only unanswered question. It's not because trustee honoraria are being cut to $5,000 in this bill. We knew that was coming. It is certainly not sufficient recompense for the kinds of hours that trustees spend. But that's not why trustees will disappear. It will be hard to get people to run for school boards because it is a thankless job with no local control, no local flexibility. That's the real cost of this loss of local accountability.

As I was saying earlier, there won't be any ability to really understand what's happening at a local level and to respond to those local needs. That's the reason trustees won't continue to run for school board. School boards may just disappear by default. Find out in your area how many people are seriously looking at running for school board a month from now.

The second reason we're likely to see school boards disappear is a direct result of this bill, because it gives the power to the minister to take over school boards to address their financial affairs. The ministry says that will only be in times of extreme financial problems, but that's not what the bill says. Basically, the minister can come in at any point that he considers important for financial reasons.

The bill provides for a review of this funding in five years — not a review of whether or not education is adequately funded; a review of whether or not it is equal. Again, we all support equity in funding, but the question that should also be asked is whether or not the funding is fair and adequate for students. Equity at the lowest common denominator does not serve the needs of students.

It's possible that this bill may be found to be not constitutional. I'm sure there will still be legal challenges. Justice Archie Campbell, when the first legal challenge was made, although he recognized the fact that he couldn't adjudicate on it because some of the actions to be taken under the legislation hadn't been taken yet, described a clause in Bill 104 as being the Henry VIII clause because of the breathtaking power it gives to cabinet in this case — with Henry VIII, it was the monarch — to legislate by proclamation.

He described that power as constitutionally suspect because it confers upon government the unprotected authority to pull itself up by its own legal bootstraps and override arbitrarily, with no further advice from the Legislative Assembly and no right to be heard by those who may be adversely affected by the change, the very legislative instrument from which the government derives its original authority. If Justice Campbell thought that clause in Bill 104 was breathtaking in its scope, wait until he sees Bill 160, which gives cabinet the power to override any act, including this one.

If this bill goes ahead, what do we face? I'm going to take a moment before the end of my time to read a bit of a column that was done by Frank Dubrovnik, a freelance writer now living in Oakville, who wrote this for the Toronto Star. He used to cover boards of education up in Alberta. He said:

"Month after month, trustees were called on to rubber-stamp various policies passed down from the Alberta education ministry, while actual budgeting issues were being decided upon in the back rooms in Edmonton. Despite a 1996-97 budget shortfall of nearly $250,000, despite rotating delegations of teachers and parents complaining of overcrowded classrooms and inadequate busing, the trustees' hands were tied.

"Aspenview's" — this particular school board's — "woes could be traced directly back to two 1995 measures by Ralph Klein's government. It shrank the number of school boards from 181 to 57 and it transferred taxation powers from local boards to the provincial education department.

"Before amalgamation, staffing levels and mill rates were set at the local level, based on the needs of each particular division. After amalgamation, each school division was simply handed $4,099 in annual grants for each student, period. Never mind if student enrolment figures fell short, as they did in Aspenview, despite the fact that staff had already been hired to accommodate them. Never mind that traditional have-not divisions were forced to become one big have-not. That's the price paid for distributing funds equally in Alberta."

It's hard not to predict similar hard times ahead for Ontario, or at least parts of it. It wouldn't be the first time Mike Harris has taken a page from Klein's cookbook, and he's picking up a recipe for disaster.

1650

A recipe for disaster it is. John Snobelen set out to create a crisis and once again he has succeeded. It's the only thing he's been able to achieve in his two years as minister; that and half a billion dollars in cuts. The crisis is almost surreal in its proportions except that it is only too real: 126,000 teachers ready to strike, feeling as though they must make their voices heard, must do anything they

can to stop this government somehow. Teachers know the government isn't listening, isn't interested in understanding them, that there is little point in talking to John Snobelen and Mike Harris. They will keep trying but they are afraid that once again there will only be fixed agendas and ultimatums and no real discussion.

Teachers are afraid that the public doesn't understand what is at risk here: not just thousands of teachers' jobs, which are most certainly at risk, but the future of publicly funded education itself. They want the public to understand that their strength and their determination in opposing this bill and this government's agenda come from their belief in protecting what the Mike Harris government is so clearly ready to destroy.

I believe that Ontario's teachers are ready to take huge risks at significant personal sacrifice. I don't believe that Ontario's teachers want to take strike action. I know that teachers want more than anything else to do what they've always done: They want to be able to go into the classroom, close the classroom door and teach kids. But they also want to be able to teach kids outside that classroom. They want to be able to protect the programs and the services they as teachers have been able to provide to their students that truly create a greater equality of opportunity for each student. They know that kind of teacher contact time with students occurs outside the classroom as well as within the walls of that classroom. It is teaching; it is teachers' work. They want to be able to continue to do that as well as teach in the classroom.

I know teachers want to be able to continue to do the voluntary extra work they have always done in providing a full curriculum, including extracurricular activities to students. They want to have qualified teachers in the classroom. They believe that the physical education teacher is not just teaching a sport that anybody can teach; he is teaching students. You have to have some understanding of the student and the child's needs in order to be able to truly make the experience of a physed class an educational experience.

This is what teachers want. They don't want to strike; they want to teach students, but they also know that this government is making that more and more impossible to do. They know that this government's agenda first and foremost is to take $1 billion out of education, because they've been told that, but they know that this government's agenda ultimately is the destruction of public education. As teachers committed to public education, they cannot stand by and let that happen without making their voices known and heard.

I know teachers are concerned, as they stand on the brink, that they may not be understood, but I believe that in part they will be successful. I think this government has to back off the $1-billion cuts they are proposing and it has to back off the cutting of thousands of teachers. If either of these actions go ahead, every word and every action of every teacher and every other critic of this government are going to be made absolutely legitimate, and that's a big political price for this government to pay. The alternative to this government's backing off the $1 billion in cuts, backing off the firing, the laying off of 6,000 to 10,000 teachers, the alternative to that $1 billion in cuts and that loss of teachers will be absolutely disastrous to an already devastated system. That would be too big a price for students to pay and much too big a price to pay for a tax cut.

I think the government will retreat, but we will have chaos in the meantime, and that too is too big a price for students to pay. In the end I believe the retreat will be temporary, because this government will seek another way to move ahead with its agenda. This bill gives them all the powers they need. They will take control and then they will begin to privatize our public system and they will destroy public education.

The bugles of attack have sounded again. Bill 160 is the second assault. The target of the attack is public education itself, and anyone who cares must now come to its defence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Questions or comments?

Mr Wildman: I'd like to congratulate my friend from Fort William for her presentation on Bill 160. It was most thoughtful and analytical. She has certainly put the issues squarely before the House. As she has emphasized, teachers and boards historically in Ontario, while having some differences, have worked for the quality of education for students. In doing so, that brought teachers and boards squarely into conflict with this government and this government's agenda. As a result, the government has consciously decided first to take away any powers that trustees might have to protect students and the quality of education and now they have turned their guns on the teaching profession. That's what Bill 160 is about.

Earlier I compared this government's approach to education to the Hollywood film Jerry Maguire, where the Treasurer of Ontario is continually, like the athlete in that movie, yelling at Mr Snobelen: "Where is the money? Show me the money." Mr Snobelen has been getting the money. He first cut $500 million from public education in this province, claiming it wasn't going to affect the classroom, but of course it did. It hurt special education, specialized programs, many of which the member for Fort William mentioned. Now he's determined to get another $1 billion out of the system. It has nothing to do with the quality of education, it has nothing to do with protecting students; it's all about getting the money for Mr Eves to help finance the tax cut, and students and teachers are being made to pay for that.

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): I was listening very closely to the comments of the member for Fort William. In her comments she raises some issues that she calls misinformation and myths. I thought I would refer to some of those issues and how they are related in the Liberal Party document, the red book, which the member for Fort William used in leading the Liberal Party in the last election.

The first issue would be international tests. What does the red book say about that? It says: "Just about everyone is worried that our schools are not challenging students to

reach high standards of achievement. The lack of consistent standards across the province has left the public concerned, parents upset, students confused, and teachers frustrated.... And we often hear reports that Ontario students don't do as well on international tests as students from other provinces and countries."

Another myth: the need to take control from school boards by the province. "Parents feel especially shut out by the current system's maze of bureaucracy and by regulations that are difficult to understand. They are frustrated by a system that seems overloaded with red tape and administration....

"The core program will be set by the provincial government, not by local school boards." Again it appears that at one time the Liberal Party thought there was a need to take control.

There's another myth, according to the member, that we're not spending too much on administration, but right here in the red book it says: "Sixteen cents out of every provincial dollar and an average of 55% of property taxes are spent on education and training. We must make sure that we are getting value for our dollar. As much as possible, our education dollars must be spent on classroom learning rather than administration."

I think the people at home will see where the Liberal Party really is on education. They can't make up their minds.

Our government said we were going to reform education, and in bills 104 and 160 we're showing that this is what we're doing.

1700

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I too want to reply to the comments made by the member for Fort William. As we follow this debate over the next few days, I know for a fact that there will be no one in this Legislature who will speak with more compassion and understanding of the education system than the member for Fort William. There will be others who speak about it, and they will speak with compassion and understanding, but not any more than the member for Fort William. Any time I have heard the member speak about education, she has done so having researched the information.

She did bring up some of the myths that exist. It's interesting that the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay would quote from the red book. In fact, it's interesting that they often quote from the red book, to the point that I think they too believe and understand and support some of the issues that we presented in there. More importantly, not only do myths exist today in education; I think there is actually sort of a crime being committed. The crime is that we're taking money away from our students.

The member for Fort William alluded to junior kindergarten. They don't care about early education, it would seem. The problem that I see this government having is that they only look at the bottom line when it comes to dollars; they don't look at the welfare of our children and the future of their education. It has been said before, and we'll repeat it time and time again: Mike Harris knows the cost of everything, but he doesn't know the value of anything.

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): I also commend the member for Fort William for her very thorough analysis of what Mike Harris and John Snobelen are up to, in pointing out that this is all about taking control of the system and taking another $1 billion out of education. I have to say I am more comfortable with the approach she has taken today than that as read back to us that she took during the last election, as described to us by the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

I will just say this. There is one part in what she said that while I wish I could agree with her, I'm not sure that she's right — and I do hope that she is right — when she said that she feels that the government will back down on some of this. I don't think that is going to happen. I don't think this government is going to back down from taking the $1 billion out of the system. I think this is what the game plan is all about. It's part and parcel of their taking the total control that they have. It's part and parcel of why they have taken so many powers away from school boards. It's why they are centralizing so much power in the hands of the Minister of Education.

We all know that at the end of the day, if we want the kind of school system that the government claims it wants and that certainly all of us want, which allows our students to do well, which allows them to compete in the world that they are going to be living in, it has to be done not just in a way that plays around with the number of days they spend in school — yes, those things may be important — but at the end of the day, it has to be done by the minister and the government being seen to be investing in real dollars and investing in terms of the attitude and the approach they give in working with our teachers, in working with our school boards, to put the emphasis where it needs to be — on what we teach inside the classroom. You don't make that any better by taking another $1 billion out of the classrooms of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs Marion Boyd): Response from the member for Fort William.

Mrs McLeod: I'm sure my colleagues will understand if I want to focus my two-minute response on the comments of the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, although I can't help but note to the member for Dovercourt that I will probably be much more comfortable with the defence of local collective bargaining that they will undoubtedly make in the balance of the debate than I was with the imposition of the social contract on the local collective bargaining process when they were in government.

Having said that, I truly wish that the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay and his cohort who hands him the red book, which he reads as a Bible, could take the intentions that were there and the places where there is a genuine consensus about what would work to improve education and learn from it and see how different it is from what their government is doing. Yes, we should take international test results and we should analyse them and

we should understand what they say to us about the importance of identifying gaps and meeting those gaps.

I was trying to say in my speech that we may have a problem that we are not providing enough support to students who do not have English as a first language. This government's cuts are going to devastate English-as-a-second-language programs in Metropolitan Toronto and Ottawa and virtually every other community where those have been a significant proportion of the dollars that have spent over the provincial averages of dollars spent on other students. When does the government acknowledge that those are unique needs that have to be met and, if they aren't met, our students will do even more poorly on international tests in the future?

Use the data as a basis for understanding what needs to be done in education. Understand that we all agree about the value of core programs, but ones developed in partnership, not ones that are imposed on teachers at the end of June and they're told they're supposed to come back to school in September and start teaching them, and not programs that set students up to fail because every student should learn to read in grade 1, when they're not being provided with enough dollars to get the support they need to actually learn how to read.

There was a huge difference between the commitments I made to education that would have supported and enhanced public education and a commitment that this government made to find $5 billion for a tax cut and to start by taking it out of education.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Wildman: I guess it's almost trite, now that we've been here with this government in office for a couple of years, to try to put their moves on education in the context of the minister's comments only a week or so after he was appointed Minister of Education and Training, but I think it is important for us to recognize that in this particular case the minister, I believe, has been quite honest with the people of Ontario. He has been very straight. He stated that he wanted to make major changes in education and he described the method that he would use as what I guess has sometimes been referred to as chaos theory, that in order to build anew, one must destroy what is there; that in order to be able to force major change, the public must be convinced that the current system is broken, is not working.

It wasn't a situation of saying that we are indeed in crisis that the minister began his term in office with, but in fact he was saying that he, as minister, must create a crisis, and he's done exactly that. In his whole approach he has attempted to destroy the education system that ironically members of his own party historically have built up over the decades since the Second World War. The minister would like to have it appear that he is moving forward with progressive change, when in fact he's trying to take us back to the 19th century. I don't think even Egerton Ryerson would have accepted what this minister is proposing as new for the province and new for students.

Historically the Conservative Party has valued education as one of the central roles of government. The responsibility of government on behalf of the public in this province is to properly educate our students for the future. We've seen historically with the Progressive Conservative Party where ministers of education — Mr Robarts, Mr Davis and their successors — were given positions of extreme importance in the government and many of them, certainly Robarts and Davis, went on to become the leaders of their party and premiers of the province because education was central to their agenda.

Education is also central to this government's agenda but it's a very different approach. The approach here is to say that what we have is bad and the people who are involved in the system must be punished. The system must be destroyed so that we can build it anew in a different image.

1710

The minister, in making those comments to his ministry staff, which were videotaped, was quite frank: If there isn't a crisis, we'll invent it, and we'll do it in such a way that the confidence that has grown over the years in education in this province will be undermined to the point that the people involved in education, the people who deliver the education for students in the province, will not have credibility. Therefore, when they object, they won't be listened to by the public. That will then make the way clear for the minister to move forward on his own agenda.

What has this agenda been? We've had some discussion about getting the money out. That's certainly the agenda, and I'll be talking more about that later. But I think it's even more insidious than simply taking money away from programs and from students. It is, first of all, centralizing, again a complete contradiction of what the Conservative Party historically has been about in Ontario, taking local autonomy, local say over education away from communities and centralizing that control here at Queen's Park. That's also part of the chaos theory the minister espoused when he became minister. If one is to invent a crisis, if one is to make major change, to force that change, one must have control.

We've seen Bill 104 where the government has significantly, not just amalgamated boards but along with this bill, Bill 160, has essentially emasculated the boards, has put the boards in a situation where they are only a shell of what they used to be as of January 1. I'm not certain why anyone would want to be a school trustee in Ontario any more, because as many of us have said all they will be is a complaints department. They won't be able to do anything. They have no authority. They cannot make any decisions. The decisions are centralized in the minister's office at Queen's Park.

Under this legislation it's even greater. That centralization is taken to the point where boards will not only suddenly be very large on January 1 and be dealing with large numbers of students in urban Ontario and large expanses of territory in rural and northern Ontario, but where they will have absolutely no say over how the school is to be funded or organized.

The teachers will be put in the situation of having to "negotiate" with these agencies, these boards, and of

being told by the boards, "I'm sorry, we don't have any money; we have no ability to raise any money; it's all decided already at Queen's Park, so we can't negotiate with you," even on things like salaries and benefits, which are the only things left in Bill 160 that are negotiable. Negotiations will be a joke.

Then if the boards and the teachers are unable to reach agreement in those areas and they decide to go to arbitration, what does this mean for arbitration? Arbitrators will have to take into account ability to pay, and since the decisions over the funding — which we have yet to see because we haven't seen the funding formula — are all made here at Queen's Park by the minister and his staff, and I suppose by the Minister of Finance, the boards won't have any say. They won't be able to respond. The arbitrators are going to have to simply say, "Well, the boards don't have the money."

The minister, in his own ingenuous fashion, gets up in the House and says he doesn't understand why the teachers are upset. After all, he threatened them with a lot of change, serious change, with regard to collective bargaining — he threatened to take away their right to strike; he threatened to take principals and vice-principals out of the bargaining unit; he threatened to say that teachers do not have to be members of the federation in order to teach in the province — and he hasn't done that. That's not included in Bill 160, not one of those three things, so why are teachers upset? He's responded, he's listened, he's consulted, even though he hardly ever meets with teachers, and when he does, all he tends to do is insult them. He doesn't understand why the teachers are upset.

Of course, he will also say, along with the Premier, "It's not the actual teachers who are upset; it's those union bosses and their underlings who purport to speak for the teachers but who don't really represent the teachers." I've often wondered how the people who say that think these people come to be leaders of unions. It's like saying that none of the members of this assembly speak for any of their constituents or the majority of their constituents. How do we get here, then? Anyway, that's what he tends to do.

Let's look at it again in the context of what this government has done. The first thing they did was to make junior kindergarten optional and then they cut the funding for it. The minister says: "It's up to the boards. It's an option. They can do it if they like. They can continue junior kindergarten. They can even expand it if they wish, but it's up to the boards."

If the boards say they don't have any money and if they have the gall to go to the teachers and if the teachers are naïve enough to actually say, "We want to continue junior kindergarten, so we're even prepared to take a situation where classes at the senior levels might increase a bit so that we can maintain junior kindergarten," then the minister gets up in the House and accuses the teachers of negotiating class sizes up and not caring about their students. That is the worst insult I think this minister has perpetrated since he started two and a half years ago.

He said the teachers are underworked and overpaid. He said they're inefficient. He said they are —

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): When did he say they were inefficient?

Mr Wildman: He said he wants to help them become efficient.

Mrs McLeod: Therefore, they must be inefficient.

Mr Wildman: Therefore, they must be inefficient, if he has to help them become efficient.

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): You're going too fast for them, Bud.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr Wildman: He said that the teachers are a self-interested group, a special interest group, who are only interested in their own welfare and their own wellbeing. He said a lot of things about teachers. I heard today he said that we have some of the best teachers in the world in Ontario. I'm glad he said that. I don't know whether this is like Saul on the road to Damascus, where he has suddenly seen the light.

I'm afraid, though, that this minister, like the rest of this government, but in particular this minister, doesn't see words in the context of truth or misrepresentation; he simply sees words as tools for achieving his ends. If he says something today and says something different tomorrow, it's not a matter of flip-flop or changing his position, it's just a matter of the circumstances and what's the easiest way to achieve his ends. As long as you believe that the end justifies the means, which of course is central to the chaos theory, then you've got to understand that it's not a matter of telling the truth or not telling the truth; these matters are relative to what the end is that is in sight.

1720

The minister can vary from insulting the people who have to implement the change, who have to teach the students in the province, to complimenting them, but in my view, in many cases it isn't genuine. The minister has engaged in the canard that the system is broken; that it doesn't serve students well in general; that our students do not achieve; that education taxes are sky high and soaring; that Ontario pays more for education than any other jurisdiction, with poorer results; that our students in this province in comparison to other jurisdictions do very badly. I use the term "canard" advisedly. The —

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Did the member for Huron have a comment?

Mrs Johns: I am just cautioning the speaker, Madam Speaker, on the parliamentary language there. I'd like to have your judgement on whether you think that's a proper vocabulary to be speaking in this House.

The Acting Speaker: I would certainly caution the member for Algoma to watch his language and remember parliamentary procedure.

Mr Wildman: The member for Fort William and the member for Dovercourt remind me that "canard" is a French word for duck. I'm reminded by that of the phrase, "If it quacks like a duck and it walks like a duck and it flies like a duck, it's a duck."

What was the second thing? I said the first thing he did was that he got rid of junior kindergarten and then he eliminated the funding. He pretended that it was going to be optional for boards and he took away the funding, so it wasn't optional at all.

Then he eliminated the funding for adult education day programs in the school system and said they could only fund adult education through the continuing education program. This is a denial of the government's and the Conservative party's own program, which is a hand up, not a handout. In other words, they want people to improve themselves, to be able to provide for themselves and their families and contribute to society, but they are at the very same time making it more difficult for adults to go back to school and gain their diplomas so they can indeed do that. Why did they do this? They did it because the minister wants to get the money out, to provide the money to the Treasurer. That's his main raison d'être, his reason for creating the crisis, his reason for the changes he has made.

He ran into a problem, because we actually elected some trustees in this province, up until very recently anyway, who care about education. Trustees were faced with the choice of having to eliminate some of these programs which are central; not just junior kindergarten, not just adult education, but special education programs which by law they are supposed to provide; English-as-a-second-language programs, particularly in Ottawa and Toronto, but also in other centres across the province; special programs for inner-city schools; in the north, some special programs for native students. They had a choice: They could eliminate these programs, or they could try to find the money to continue them, because the government was cutting their grants. So some boards had the temerity to increase property taxes.

The government said: "Wait a minute, this isn't what we wanted. We are talking about equity." They really do subvert the language. For them, "equity" means bringing everybody down to the lowest common denominator: "We want equity. We want everybody in the province, every student in the province, funded at the same level. We do not want flexibility and differences among boards and communities. We're not talking about bringing the students in rural Ontario up to the level, as close as possible, to some of the funding levels in urban Ontario. We're talking about bringing urban funding down." That's how they define equity.

What did they do? They said, "We've got to take on the boards." What they said was, "We'll amalgamate boards and we'll take away powers from boards." In Bill 104 they began that process and it's continued in 160.

That then left them with the education workers, the people who are teachers' aides, custodians, clerical staff and teachers, the people who provide education for students, the people who work with students, as the next target, as part of the creation of the crisis.

I've listened carefully to this debate, and many of the Conservative members have said they want to increase the amount of time teachers have with students, and all of us think that's a good idea. But the inference, the underlying view of the Conservatives seems to be that a lot of teachers are, I don't know, wasting their time or something. I don't know what they think they're doing, whether they think they're sitting in the staff room playing cards all day.

They ignore the fact that while there are a lot of teachers who do not have 32 or 25 kids in their classrooms every day, all the time — they sometimes have preparation; they sometimes have remedial classes for students; they deal with students on a one-on-one basis; they deal with parents on a one-on-one basis; they attend meetings to deal with students' problems and difficulties; and there are teachers who deal with kids with special needs on a much lower ratio of maybe 8, 10, 12 students to 1.

Of course, they don't count the principals and the vice-principals as teachers because they seem to have no idea of what the principal-teacher concept means. They don't see the principal as the leader of a team in a school who is in charge of the teaching approach in the school. They see the principal simply as an administrator who shouldn't be seen as one of the teachers in the system. They decided to turn their guns on this group and that's what Bill 160 is mainly about.

I honestly think that this government, as part of the crisis-chaos theory of the minister, is determined to provoke a confrontation with the teachers and the education workers in this province, in a real contradiction of terms for a minister who says he's interested in putting students at the head of the class. I think the minister would welcome a disruption in classes. I think the government wants to force the teachers to take action to protect their students, the quality of education and their own bargaining rights.

1730

Just look at Bill 160 and what's in it, what they're facing teachers and education workers with. Let's look at a couple of things. According to this bill the minister may make regulations regarding days of work, some or all of the five working days preceding the start of the school year. They may make regulations authorizing the principal to decide what will be done on those days. The government may make regulations "prescribing...the school year, school terms, school holidays, instructional days, examination days and professional activity days."

The inference on things like professional activity days is that there is nothing useful done, nothing that helps students, that somehow this is a holiday for teachers. What does that say to the profession in this province? It basically is saying to them: "We don't value what you do for students. We don't think that you're really interested in the best interests of your students, when you go on a professional development day, you're just goofing off."

It's a little hard to understand exactly what the minister is about, because as has been pointed out in this debate, last Monday the minister said, "We're going to have the students and the teachers going back to school a week before Labour Day." Then on Wednesday and Thursday he backtracked and said, "Oh, no, I was just talking about

the teachers." Of course he had justified having teachers and students going back a week before Labour Day on the basis that there needs to be an increasing amount of time when students and teachers are in contact with one another. If the minister was only talking about teachers when he said that, how on earth does that increase contact between teachers and students if the teachers are the only ones who go back a week before Labour Day?

Then, afterwards, he said, "Maybe we'll find the extra time for contact between students and teachers during the school year, and if we have the teachers come back a week early, they can do what they were doing on some of these other days during the year in the last part of August so we'll have more time for contact during the school year."

The problem was even then the math didn't add up, unless he was talking about changing the holidays, shortening the Christmas holiday and the March break. But the minister then said no, he wasn't talking about that. What on earth was he talking about? I don't think he knows. If there is anybody who needs to do a little remedial math, it's obviously the minister because he can't work out the number of days he is talking about in the school year.

Obviously these changes the minister can make to the regulations under Bill 160 will change the number of days that there is contact between students and teachers, and most people would say: "That's reasonable. I don't understand why the teachers would be upset about that." Except they don't understand in making those kinds of statements that on some of the professional development days the teachers are dealing with issues that affect the quality of education for students. That's what those professional development days are about, and if you cut them from nine to five, I guess arbitrarily you're saying, "They can do all that in five days; they don't need to have nine days." The point is that up until now all of these matters have been negotiable between teachers and boards.

This Bill 160 is about constricting the terms of negotiation. It's about constricting the scope for negotiation between teachers and boards. Some would say: "What difference does that make, since the boards have no power anyway? Why should the teachers be concerned? Boards aren't going to be able to really properly negotiate."

Also, Bill 160 says that the government will have regulation-making powers governing class size and the method for determining it, as well as the minimum amount of instructional time in a day, limiting the assignment of a teacher to non-instructional duties, designating non-teaching positions and the minimum qualifications for a designated position. I'd like to go through each of these.

Most people in Ontario — teachers, trustees, students, parents, members of the general public — would welcome limits on class size. The problem is that in Bill 160 it doesn't say anything about numbers. I know the minister has difficulty with numbers, except when it comes to taking money out, because he can't figure out the number of days in a school year. That's part of his problem: He can't add. If he's genuinely interested in lowering class sizes in Ontario, why didn't he put the numbers in the bill? A range: Primary level should have this range of numbers of students in a class; intermediate level, another number; senior level, another number. Why? There are some who might be tempted to think the reason is that he isn't about lowering class size, but he may in fact be aiming at increasing class size.

There's another problem with this, though. If the government is determined to take the $1 billion out, over and above the $500 million they've already taken out of education, and if at the same time the government is limiting class size, how are the boards going to square this circle? Well, that's where we get to the other parts of this machiavellian plot.

What the government is going to be able to do is limit assignment of a teacher to non-instructional duties and deal with questions around preparation time. What is this about? It's about freeing up teachers from prep time to do more classroom work. Most people would say that's a good thing, except they forget what they are preparing for. What do teachers do in preparation time? Why is it called preparation time? They're not playing cards in the staff room. What they are doing is preparing new lessons for their students or they are working with remedial students or they are doing interviews, meetings, whatever, for the benefit of students.

But you only believe that if you actually believe that teachers are interested in students, and I guess those in this government who have said that teachers spend too much time away from students don't really believe that teachers are interested in their students. If they believe that, I don't understand why they think these people became teachers. Surely the only reason for becoming a teacher is because you want to help students achieve. You have a love of learning. You care about kids.

The real reason for limiting preparation time is to lower the number of teachers. The estimates vary depending on what actually comes out of this, but the change in preparation time may mean there are going to be anywhere from 4,000 to 6,000, and there have been estimates as high as 10,000, fewer teachers in Ontario as a result of this change.

How does eliminating positions for teachers improve the quality of education for students? If one of the Conservative members could just answer that question, I would start to understand, I guess, what the minister's program, what his agenda is really about, if it isn't just the chaos theory, if it isn't just about creating and inventing a crisis so that he can change the system substantially.

Let's look at a couple of other things: designating non-teaching positions and the minimum qualifications for a designated position. What this is about is saying that in certain areas people do not have to have teacher qualifications, they do not have to be certified as teachers in order to instruct students.

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What sorts of areas? We've had the list before: library. The people who say that don't see the library as a teaching resource. They don't see the librarian as a teacher. So they think we can just bring in technicians who will be able to

catalogue books and other learning materials and won't be involved in the actual development of curriculum and teaching of students, teaching research skills, the ability to analyse and to be able to use resource material to solve problems and to learn.

We've also seen guidance, the suggestion that we should have social workers or psychologists doing guidance at the secondary level in particular rather than teachers; the suggestion that at early childhood education, at junior kindergarten and lower, we should really just have early childhood educators trained in community colleges teach. It's important to recognize that their diplomas give early childhood educators the right to instruct children up to the age of 10. We're not just talking about preschoolers.

This is really scary for some teachers and we may be seeing it, certainly in junior kindergarten if it still exists, kindergarten if it still exists after the cuts in education and the money is taken out. We may find in the future people designated who aren't teachers who may be instructing at the primary level, grades 1 and 2.

For those of us who have observed this government and the way it deals with so-called special interest groups, we understand why people are cynical and worried about the intentions of this government and in particular this minister. While the government and the minister say they are interested in improving the quality of education for students, they know the whole purpose is to take the money out, and by changing the designation of a non-teaching position, what this means is that boards can hire people who do not have teaching qualifications and they don't have to pay them the same level they pay teachers. That's what it's about, getting the money out, not improving the quality of education for kids.

These non-designated staff people could also teach other things. They could teach music. They could teach art. They could teach technical subjects. They could do computer studies. The possibilities are endless. Why are the teachers then worried? They're worried obviously about their own positions and their own jobs. There's no question about that. But they are also worried, and this is something nobody on the other side of the aisle seems to understand, about the quality of education for the kids in the classroom.

Teachers aren't the only people who care about quality of education, but they are perhaps, as the minister has said from time to time, the most important people in the system. The most important education tool we have is a dedicated, knowledgeable, caring teacher.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): Students are the most important thing.

Mr Wildman: I said the most important tool for educating students. There's no question the students are what the education system is for. But this government sees the education system as a money cow to help finance its tax cut. That's what it's about.

What position is the board going to be in if the board cannot maintain with dwindling grants the class sizes that will be set out under regulation? In the past, boards have been able to raise municipal taxes, set higher mill rates. What does Bill 160 do about that?

Section 234 of the bill gives the provincial government funding powers requiring that the government "operate in a fair and non-discriminatory manner." That sounds reasonable, except what does it really mean? It means the Minister of Finance will prescribe tax rates for school purposes across the province. This applies to both businesses and residential ratepayers. There will be a uniform tax rate for single-family and multi-unit residential properties for the education portion of the tax bill, and the government has said it will freeze education property taxes.

What does this mean? The power and the accountability for tax levies at the local level has been taken away from the local authority, the school board. It has been centralized at Queen's Park, part of the centralizing agenda of this government. The power has been taken away from the boards and given to Queen's Park. So on the one hand the ministry will cut the grants to get the money out; on the other hand, they will set the mill rates and set the tax rates, and they are going to set class sizes. How on earth are the boards going to be able to comply? How on earth can teachers negotiate with boards that don't have any ability to raise money and will be directed from Queen's Park as to how they can tax and how much money they are going to have?

The ultimate irony in Bill 160 is that it says that if the provincial system for setting tax rates and funding education is found lacking, it may be repealed in five years, and they likely will restore local taxing powers. So we have a situation where the government will by then, I guess they feel, have achieved the $1 billion in savings, where they'll have taken that money out of education, a total of $1.5 billion away from the students in this province, where the boards aren't doing well, the students' education is suffering, and after five years the government can turn it all over to the municipalities again and say: "Okay, now you're stuck with this situation. You raise the property taxes to make up for the problems that have occurred because this government took so much money out of education." It really is machiavellian.

What are we faced with this fall? We're faced with a situation where there is tremendous uncertainty: for parents and students, for teachers and taxpayers. There may be a significant confrontation between the teachers and the provincial government that will lead to a disruption in classes for students right across Ontario. There is the certainty that as of January 1, 1998, there will be complete chaos in the education system because Bill 104, the companion piece, will have taken effect. New boards will be in place. In the next two years those boards will be busy trying to reorganize themselves and they won't be doing very much of anything that is going to benefit the quality of education for students.

The government will have all the power here at Queen's Park. The minister will have achieved the changes he wants. We still don't know what his funding formula is going to be — it may be coming later this

fall — but we do know that he will have all the control over the funding of education and he'll be able to get the money out. He'll have gotten that money out. Students will have been hurt. The quality of education will deteriorate. Teacher morale will be very low. Local parents and ratepayers won't have any real say over their local education. But the bottom line is that the government will have achieved a saving at the expense of the students and their education.

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Bill 160 does a lot of things. It provides for regulations that will restrict the ability of teachers and boards to bargain. It will set class size and the method for determining class size. Regulations will determine preparation time and instructional time, the length of the school day and the school year. All of these have been matters, particularly class size and prep time, for negotiations in the past. This bill is about limiting the scope of negotiations between teachers and boards. There will be a repeal of statutory teacher contracts.

I guess the school year will have been lengthened, although we're not sure exactly what the minister means by that; he doesn't seem to know himself. But Bill 160 will permit regulations authorizing principals to determine what work will be done before Labour Day. There will be changes in terms of regulations about instructional days, examination days and professional activity days.

There will be some sort of regulations governing class sizes and the method for determining that; again, a matter that used to be a matter for negotiations. We don't know whether that will benefit students, but we certainly know that it is going to be achieved in a way that will make it possible for the government to save money.

Bill 160 will permit positions that are not teaching positions and duties that are not teaching duties, and it will prescribe the minimum qualifications for a designated position, for performing these duties. In other words, people who are not teachers will be taking the place of teachers in front of students and instructing students.

Taxation powers of local boards will be suspended indefinitely and the provincial government will set the rates for business and residential taxes. I guess there will be a new funding formula that hasn't been unveiled yet which will determine the total amount of money available to each board. This funding formula will be reviewed in the year 2003 and it may be changed at that point.

This government has levelled a concerted attack at public education in Ontario. The minister came to power on the basis of a commitment made by his political party in 1995 that they were in fact going to make changes in education without affecting classroom education for students. That was based on misinformation that I think they believed. I may be giving them too much when I say that, but I think they believed that 45% to 47% of school expenditures were outside the classroom, when in fact about 10% or 15% are administrative for school boards; 70% of every board's budget, or close to it, is teachers' and educational workers' salaries.

It is impossible for this government or any government to take the amount of money they are talking about out of the education system without getting rid of staff. It's just impossible.

If members of the governing party believe, as I believe some of them do, that teachers aren't really valuable and aren't important in the education system, I suppose it's okay to cut teachers, but if you believe as I do that the vast majority of people who are in the education system as teachers and instructors are there because they care about kids, they care about learning and they want to help students achieve as much as possible and to reach their individual potentials, then cutting their positions, attacking them, hurting their morale and forcing them into a position of confrontation is not good for education — but it does fit with chaos theory. It does make sense if the person who is designing the agenda and implementing that agenda believes that changes must be made and the way to make change is to ensure that there is a chaotic situation and to undermine the credibility of those who are central to delivering education to students.

We have seen the attacks on trustees and school boards by this government, and now we're seeing the attack on teachers. The government is doing everything they can to try and isolate the teachers from the parents, to try and isolate the teachers from the community, to isolate the teachers from their students and to try and divide the teachers themselves. Frankly, I think the government may have underestimated the determination of teachers to protect the quality of education in this province.

Everyone recognizes that there needs to be continual improvement in education, that education is not static, that it is something that continues to grow. There must be change in order to meet new circumstances and meet new needs for students in the society that we live in and in the community that we serve, but that kind of change must be on a continuum and it must involve the very people this government is attacking. Even the minister must recognize that if there is going to be change delivered in this province in the education system, it must be delivered by the people he is attacking. Surely that is self-defeating.

One does not improve the education system by hurting teacher morale. One does not improve education for students by forcing teachers into a confrontational position. One does not improve the quality of education for students in Ontario by continually badmouthing the very people who deliver that education, by telling people that they're not really interested in the quality of education, they're just in it for high pay and low amounts of work. That in itself demonstrates a misunderstanding of the role of the teacher, the responsibility of the teacher.

Teachers care about kids, they care about learning, and they work very hard, both in school, during the school hours, at home and in the community after school on behalf of their students. If we had a minister and a government that would recognize that and work with teachers to improve education for students, then we would be in the tradition of people like Robarts and Davis. I had lots of differences with them and their successors, but I believe

they were genuinely interested in education. Now we have a government that calls itself Progressive Conservative, that only sees dollar signs when they see kids in schools and teachers in schools, and is only interested in cutting the amount of dollars going into that system. Well, the teachers won't allow it. They care enough about their students that they will not let some theorist about chaos theory destroy the very system they have worked so hard to make serve the interests of students.

Bill 160 must be changed. It must recognize the central role of teachers and education workers in the lives of our students and in the future of our communities. I call on the government to withdraw Bill 160 and start over by consulting with the people who are important in terms of delivering education for our students.

I think at this time it would be best to adjourn debate.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): It now being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until about half past 6.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening sitting reported in volume B.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line	Should read:
236	12421	2	21	misunderstood. Dr John Aw, president of Calex Bio-
236	12421	2	24	concerns with the future of food safety. Dr Aw wrote to

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 septembre 1997

The House met at 1830.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR MUNICIPAL FINANCE ACT, 1997 (No. 2)

LOI DE 1997 SUR LE FINANCEMENT ÉQUITABLE DES MUNICIPALITÉS (Nº 2)

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 149, An Act to continue the reforms begun by the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997 and to make other amendments respecting the financing of local governments / Projet de loi 149, Loi continuant les réformes amorcées par la Loi de 1997 sur le financement équitable des municipalités et apportant d'autres modifications relativement au financement des administrations locales.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: We don't seem to have a quorum. As a matter of fact, we seem to have less than 10 members in the House right now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Would you check if we have a quorum.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe it was the NDP last time, so I recognize the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): I'm pleased to continue second reading debate on Bill 149. Assessment is the main issue in the act, and the members will recall that in Bill 106 our government brought about reforms to the assessment system to try and address the kind of confusion that was present in Ontario's assessment system. I can certainly recall from my background as a small-town solicitor that the assessment system had many problems in it that had been gathering up over years and years of development.

There were systems in Ontario that were widely different from one another. I know in the area where I practised in Muskoka, they adopted a much more up-to-date market value system than was present in some parts of the province. Of course there are lots of stories out there about the system that existed in Metro Toronto where many of the assessment records indicated values that dated back to 1949. This was often referred to as a patchwork quilt of assessment systems in Ontario. You had very up-to-date systems that were based on market value, some of them updated as frequently as every two, three or four years.

What we tried to do in Bill 106 was address the concerns in Ontario with the assessment problems and the fact that assessment throughout the province was very dissimilar from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some municipalities used it to advantage to attract commercial and industrial investment and some municipalities used it to attract residential development. It was not a level playing field and we, as a government, felt it was important to try and level out the playing field, try and bring about a process whereby all jurisdictions in Ontario had the same assessment system. We adopted an assessment system in Bill 106 where we would have universal assessment values all across Ontario based on 1996 values.

The provisions set out in Bill 106 referred to an update that's done on a regular basis using rolling averages. As well, we addressed the concern of the business community and of municipalities with the business occupancy tax. I know from having dealt with several municipalities as a solicitor and, in some cases, providing advice to commercial clients or real estate purchasers that the business occupancy tax was a problem for municipalities. It was a problem for municipalities because they had difficulty enforcing it against tenants of properties who chose to leave the jurisdiction. It was not enforceable against the owner of the property and so what we brought in in Bill 106 was a more flexible system, a system whereby the municipality will have more opportunities to collect what would replace the business occupancy tax.

We also said in Bill 106 that we would set tax rates for six standard property classes: residential and farm, commercial, farm lands and managed forests, multiresidential, industrial and pipelines.

Bill 149 is a follow-up to Bill 106. It contains amendments around Bill 106 and around the statutes that Bill 106 affected. In many ways I think it's a demonstration of our government's commitment to consultation, to listening to people who have concerns, and it demonstrates our willingness to fine-tune the changes that we bring about to legislation.

The comments that we received from small business indicated that they felt that there should be provision in the assessment rules in Ontario to allow municipalities to be flexible in dealing with businesses, to make sure that if a

municipality felt it was fair, they could set up a tiered tax rate system, so that if you're in a lower-valued commercial property and you're a small business, you could be treated according to your circumstances by the municipalities.

Under Bill 149, small businesses will benefit because they will now have the opportunity to be part of a system with up to three bands of assessment. I can see in my own riding how there would be an opportunity for municipalities to tailor their assessment system so that they can direct it at encouraging small business to continue to stay in the downtown areas in municipalities, something that's a great concern to a lot of small towns. They don't want the residential or the retail flavour of the downtown area to change; they want to maintain it. They don't want everyone to flock from the downtown area out to the malls. I think this provides a tool to municipalities where they may be able to address the issues of concern for downtown merchants in small towns.

1840

Bill 149 also provides that properties can be taxed at a lower rate when there's an absence of business activity. What we are doing with our proposed amendment is that we would inscribe the rate reduction in the legislation rather than in regulation. This is something that was suggested to us and we're acting on it. That's why it's in Bill 149. It's a fine-tuning of the broad brush strokes that were in Bill 106.

What we're proposing in Bill 149 is that if a full commercial-type property is not being occupied or fully operational, the municipality could provide a rate reduction of up to 30% on the assessment for that property, and if it's industrial property, the reduction could be as much as 35%. Again, we're addressing the concerns raised by the commercial and industrial community with respect to the assessment reforms we want to bring in, and Bill 149 provides the municipalities with the tools so they can deal with the concerns raised by industrial and commercial ratepayers in their municipalities.

Bill 149 also provides some flexibility for municipalities when they're dealing with charities. We wanted to be sure that municipalities had the necessary flexibility and we wanted to recognize the great benefits that charities can bring to municipalities and other communities. In Bill 149 charitable organizations can receive a tax rebate from the municipality of up to 40% of their total property tax on space they occupy in commercial or industrial properties.

To help the municipalities administer this program, we're proposing an amendment that would define charities that are eligible with reference to the federal Income Tax Act. We want to keep it simple. That's the general way that charities are identified in Canada. That's the way for municipalities to define how that special category of rebate would apply.

Of course, we're concerned about farm lands and we're proposing that there be three tax rate ranges for different stages of development in farm lands. We want to provide an incentive to farmers to continue farming and also to recognize that while they are awaiting development they should not be harmed by the assessment system.

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I know what the member says is extremely important and there should at least be a quorum in the House to listen to him. I don't believe there is a quorum right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you please check if we have a quorum.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

Mr Grimmett: As I was saying, farm lands are being recognized in Bill 149 as requiring special attention. Of course, our government is very concerned about the interests of farmers in Ontario and we've responded to the concerns that they raised with respect to our new assessment regime. We suggest in Bill 149 that there could be three tax rate ranges for the different stages of development in farm lands. The bill provides an incentive to continue farming on those lands that are awaiting development rather than penalizing farmers who are considering development and we would maintain a tax reduction for those properties until the development actually occurs.

In regard to theatres, the theatre industry, the theatre community spoke to our government. They raised concerns. They wanted to have a level playing field. Bill 149 proposes that competing, publicly owned theatres in Metro make payments in lieu of taxes at the same rate when they're used for staged, for-profit productions, and all smaller private theatres in Ontario with fewer than 1,000 seats would receive the same property tax exemptions afforded to their publicly owned counterparts. I know that's going to be an item of great interest in my riding where the summer theatres are a very important part of the culture. I'm sure they will benefit a great deal from this special recognition contained in Bill 149 for smaller, private theatres.

Bill 149 also contains relief for seniors and it contains some clarification of the issue of how seniors are going to be dealt with under a new assessment regime. I've recently met with constituents who had considerable concerns about how they were going to continue to deal with their property taxes in their retirement while they're on fixed incomes.

Bill 106 requires municipalities to provide a program of relief for low-income property owners who are seniors or who have disabilities. It also allows municipalities to phase in municipal tax exchanges resulting from that reassessment over a period of up to eight years. Bill 149 extends this tax relief to the education portion of the property taxes.

Again, our government is working to make property assessment and taxation consistent and understandable. We're trying to increase the accountability. We know that Ontario and Ontario's small business is the engine that drives the Canadian economy and there are special recognitions of small business contained in Bill 149.

We are also addressing the special area of concern around rights of way. Again, it's a hodgepodge, where the commercial entities that own rights of way are dealt with by municipalities in a variety of ways. We want to make sure they are all dealt with in a similar fashion.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): Tax them to the hilt.

Mr Grimmett: I know the NDP would love to tax them to death. We don't think that's fair. Everybody deserves tax fairness in Ontario, even the people who own rights of way. Bill 149 sets out some great rules to clarify how we're doing to deal with rights of way. We're going to break up the province into regions and we're going to make sure that those commercial entities that have rights of way are dealt with fairly. We don't want to drive them out of the province because of assessment reform.

Mr Bisson: On a point of order, Speaker: I would point out that yet again the government doesn't seem to be able to hold a quorum in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Please check if we have a quorum.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

Mr Grimmett: I'll conclude my remarks now.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): It's very interesting to listen to the member's presentation on this bill on property reassessment, particularly given that every municipal official, every mayor in Ontario is saying they just don't believe this government when it comes to their downloading proposals.

It says that there's going to become accountability in the property tax system, yet the role of the Ontario Municipal Board is going to be eliminated. This is a very serious matter and requires serious attention to fix some inequities in the property tax system, yet the provincial government will not share any numbers. There are only three months left in this calendar year. Businesses need the time, they need some knowledge about how they can plan one of their very important expenditures and, unfortunately, the government refuses to provide any kind of numbers or provide any kind of planning data so that a business can know what its expenditures are going to be.

We have not seen the tax rates that are set by the minister and in fact the government has not even done any impact studies. They haven't even asked for that information to be provided for what the impact of this bill is. I would say it's pretty fundamental in any piece of public policy to know what the effect is going to be of any piece of legislation, and that just hasn't happened here. There has not been enough thought and enough planning that has gone into this document. They've refused to provide the numbers, and it's unconscionable that a piece of legislation as important as this would proceed without that kind of information.

1850

Mr Bisson: This bill in so many words is MVA. This is the bill with which the Harris government is going to impose market value assessment on cities — basically in the city of Toronto — something they said they wouldn't do when they were in opposition. I remember, Mr Speaker, because I was a member of the government, as you were a member of the official opposition during 1990 to 1995 when the then government, the Bob Rae government, looked at imposing market value assessment on the city of Toronto. There was huge opposition on the part of the opposition parties of this assembly, as well as the municipal councils of Toronto and others, who said: "Stop MVA. This is not something we want imposed by the province." I remember at the time the then third party had a very different position from the one they have now.

The other point I make to the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay is that he talks about how this bill, in his words, "will make sure that everybody is treated the same." Somehow or other that's supposed to mean that people who have rights of way, like rail companies and others across Ontario, will be taxed the same and that somehow will save them and consumers or taxpayers money.

The reality is that there are a number of companies that are charged differently when it comes to rights of way for very real reasons when it comes to historical perspective. If you take a look at the issue of CN and CP in the city of Toronto and how municipal taxes have been applied, it dates back some years and it was utilized at the time as an ability to attract investment into the city of Toronto. For the member opposite to somehow suggest that introducing this will make sure that everybody is treated the same and that therefore equals lower taxes — excuse me. In the end it will mean that a lot of people who own rights of way will see their taxes go up, not down.

When this government purports this to be a decrease in taxes, I think they've got to be clear. For a number of people in Ontario it will mean they'll pay more property taxes, and people who have rights of way, like rail companies and others, will see their taxes actually go up, depending on the community. So much for tax fighters.

Mr Gerretsen: I think the point the member for Cochrane South made was an excellent one in that this is MVA. This is market value assessment. We all remember what the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing ran on during the last election campaign. He handed out posters — I was looking for one here and I know you wouldn't want me to use it anyway — that said basically the Mike Harris government would never introduce market value assessment, and we've seen it now.

People change their minds from time to time, but what this government doesn't do is at least acknowledge to the people, "Yes, we are implementing market value assessment, and yes, what the minister said during the election campaign, and the other minister" — I believe it was the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism — "when they said they were against market value assessment and the Mike Harris government would never introduce that, they were wrong." Then at least they would have some credibility with the people out there.

But to somehow disguise it under another smokescreen is — I can't say the word —not quite truthful; it is not quite the same. I think you can draw your own conclusion. When you run on a platform and hand out a piece of propaganda during an election campaign saying, "The Mike Harris government will never introduce market value assessment," and then come in with a bill that introduces market value assessment, I think the people of Ontario can make up their own minds as to whether or not those two particular members have remained truthful to their election campaign.

That's what this is all about. I will continue in a few minutes in the same vein.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): This is another of those bills presented in this place by this government that's fraught with pitholes and traps first of all to try to convince people, on one hand, that it's wonderful, it's evolutionary, it's changing in a direction that's progressive, but on the other hand, when you get into it and you begin to see the detail and understand what it's about, it's fraught with traps that will ultimately end up costing us all more, particularly property taxpayers in province, and that's unfortunate.

It's one of these Trojan horse bills. They bring in the Trojan horse and it looks very nice. Everybody is impressed and bowing down and saying, "Wow, isn't this wonderful?" But only a short time later when you open the door and the enemy comes jumping out and begins to slaughter all around, you find that it is too late. That's what this government is about. But any of you who have been back home in your constituency, who have been reading the papers, know that the people are beginning to realize what you're doing and they're going to be calling you to task.

Just as my colleague from Kingston said a few minutes ago, I think it's important to note that this bill is a complete flip-flop from the position taken by this government in the election campaign. Here's a government that prides itself in keeping its promise, and yet in a pamphlet put out by the minister himself, Mr Leach, during the campaign he says, "My party and I will never" — and he underlines "never" —

Mr Gerretsen: Oh, you have it.

Mr Martin: I have it. "My party and I will never support the imposition of market value assessment in Metro Toronto."

So what do we do? We change it from "market value assessment" to "actual value assessment." How stupid do you really think the people out there are?

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, you have two minutes.

Mr Grimmett: I'd like to thank the members for Oriole, Kingston and The Islands, Sault Ste Marie and Cochrane South for their very insightful comments.

Just as we listened to the comments from stakeholders in the community when we came in with Bill 106, I've been listening to the comments of my colleagues on Bill 149. It's very likely that they have read Bill 149 in detail, but I would urge them to read it again in detail. I think if the member for Kingston and The Islands and the member for Sault Ste Marie read it in detail, they will recognize the distinctions between "actual value assessment" and "market value assessment."

The difference is quite clear. We're updating the values based on actual sales of properties and we're using rolling averages. It's a very accurate system. It's quite different from a market value system.

It's also important that when they're looking in there, they'll find in the bill that we're providing the kind of relief that a lot of stakeholders who talked to us about Bill 106 were looking for. One of the areas of relief was with respect to these major rights of way that we find in Ontario, and the commercial operators who own those rights of way were very concerned that they be treated fairly. One of the great marks of Bill 149 is the way we deal fairly not only with small businesses, farmers and municipalities, but also with the owners of rights of way. They know this is a government they can come to, no matter how big they are, no matter how big a corporation they are, and they're going to be dealt with fairly. We're also dealing with farmers and developers in this bill, but when we deal with the rights of way, we deal very fairly with those people.

When my colleagues look very closely at Bill 149, the difference between actual value assessment way over here and market value assessment way over here will become clear to them.

Mr Bisson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to allow the member from Muskoka two minutes to explain the difference between AVA and MVA.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? No. Further debate.

Mr Gerretsen: That's very interesting, what just happened in the House. Here the opposition agreed to let a government member explain the difference between actual value assessment and market value assessment and then government members themselves denied that member the opportunity. It surely has to be a first in the House that government members don't want one of their own colleagues to get up and explain something to the people of Ontario that he thinks is very easy to explain. But I can't see it, because whether you're talking about the actual value of something or the market value of something, you're talking about exactly the same thing. All I can tell you is that we had two ministers who campaigned on a promise not to implement market value assessment and they've brought it in with this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Kingston and The Islands has the floor.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: He has the floor, so please stop interfering.

Mr Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I headed a municipality that actually went through one of these reassessments in 1982 and I can tell you from that experience that the people of Ontario don't know what's

going to hit them until this is actually implemented. The fatal mistake we made in 1982 when we implemented it was that we relied on government figures and statistics as to what it was actually going to do to property values.

1900

We at that time as a council, believing that the province would at least give us the right figures, relied totally on that, and we were told by a Davis Conservative government in those days, and the people who worked for them, that the differences will be no more than 10%, 20% at most on the vast majority of properties, over 90% to 95%. Then we saw the result after it was actually implemented, and I can tell you that people got a heck of a shock, because the studies that were produced prior to the implementation and what actually happened after implementation, whether it was actual value or market value, were totally different. In some cases the values and the taxes on properties went up by 80% to 90% and in some cases they went down by 20% or 30%. I can well understand this government's hesitancy to produce its figures now, because it wasn't just the experience in Kingston and The Islands that they had in 1982. There were many other similar experiences that they went through and that subsequent governments have gone through where market value has been implemented.

The reason they don't want to show the people the accurate studies is because of the tremendous impact it's going to have on what people are actually going to pay in taxes. You can minimize it — I don't care what you do right now — but a year from now you'll agree with me whether you like it or not. It's going to have a much greater significance in each one of your communities, what people are going to be paying in property taxes. It's a no-win situation, because the people whose taxes are going up are going to say, "Yeah, you're an all right sort of fellow but you're the guy who raised my taxes," and you, the government members, will have to account for all that. If somebody's taxes go down, you know what they'll tell you: "I always told you I paid too much. It's about time something was done about it."

I think the only way you can get into it on a province-wide basis is by telling people what the effects will be before you implement it. Let's just wait and see, but I can almost guarantee you that you'll live to regret it, because this is going to affect the people of Ontario perhaps even more than the downloading bill. The downloading bill is going to affect people overall by about a 10% or 15% tax increase, but this is going to affect individual property owners, and in some cases they'll go up 100% and in some cases they may go down 60% or 70%. It's going to happen. It didn't just happen in my community; it happened in other communities that implemented it as well. That's one thing I wanted to say.

Release your impact studies. The ministry has those studies. The minister knows what the numbers are. He knows how it's going to affect property values in Ontario, and I dare say that's probably one of the reasons the business occupancy tax has been done away with. They have discovered that if they had that in place as well, some commercial properties would just skyrocket in the amount of tax they would have to pay. There's a connection there, I can assure you.

The other aspect of it deals with the seniors' tax relief. In other words, there is an implicit understanding there that the taxes on a lot of homes that are occupied by seniors will increase; why else give a provision whereby some of the increased taxes on houses that senior citizens live in can be delayed? I don't know about you, but most of the seniors I know, the vast majority of whom own their houses, pride themselves in the fact they can still stay in their own houses and look after themselves and pride themselves in the fact that they don't have any debts at all. They're usually the first ones to go down to city halls and town halls to pay the taxes whenever the tax bill comes out. They don't owe any credit card debts. They don't owe any mortgages on their houses any more. They're debt-free and they feel good about it.

We're now saying to these people, "If you can't afford the property tax increases, we can somehow have it be a charge against a house that we can collect from you after you're gone or if you sell the house." I know of no senior citizen who would like a debt against their house of let's say $1,000 just building up year after year. People feel very uncomfortable about it. These are the people, you may recall, who went through the Depression and saw the tremendous effects the Depression had on their own lives. They don't want to owe anybody anything and they certainly don't want to owe any money to the city hall or the town hall, particularly when most of them have a notion that if you don't pay your taxes for three years, the city can come along and sell your house for back taxes etc. They're the first ones to pay up every year and they're proud that they don't owe anybody anything.

Now as a sop the government is saying, "We noted in most cases that your taxes are going up, but you don't have to pay it now; we'll just put it as a charge against your house and you can pay us 10 or 15 years from now when you leave," but of course it's a building fund. If it's going to be $1,000 one year, the year after that it may be $1,100 and then $1,200, and before you know it, it may be a total of $20,000, $25,000, $30,000. Most seniors I know don't want this relief. They just want to be left alone. They just want to live out the last days of their lives in a very useful and contented manner knowing that they don't owe anybody any money.

That's just a pure fallacy. It's something that has been created to say, "We can deal with you in this way by setting up this senior tax relief." They don't want it. Why don't you produce the figures so they can make up their own minds as to whether they think it's a good deal? I can assure you that the vast majority does not think it's a good deal.

The other interesting one — it affects particularly a municipality like my own — is the way this act deals with tax-exempt properties. In my community we did some studies a number of years ago, and I think about a third of all the properties are tax-exempt. That means they are federal or provincial government buildings, educational

institutions, hospitals, in my case penitentiaries, and a number of other quasi-government buildings where the government basically doesn't pay any taxes. They don't pay taxes based on the actual value of that property or the market value of that property, and usually the grants that have traditionally been given, in lieu of those taxes, to those municipalities that have a lot of those tax-exempt properties are about half of what the taxes would be on that particular property. It's never a done deal, there are always negotiations going on, and every now and then the amount is raised, but it's not an automatic thing that you have with, for example, ordinary property taxation where a council sets a mill rate, applies it to the value of a property and determines how much tax that property has to pay. It's always a case where the municipality has to wait around and see how much the federal government and the provincial government in their good graces say they're going to get in grants in lieu of taxes that year.

This is a perfect opportunity for the government to do something about it. In our community we have argued this point for at least 30 years. Why don't they just pay the normal tax or even three quarters of the normal tax or half the normal tax? At least make it in such a way that the treasurers and the CAOs of those kinds of municipalities can determine that yes, that's what the amount of money is going to be.

1910

I can tell you, not only didn't they fix that problem, they made it a lot worse, because now it is no longer $75 a bed as it was with respect to hospitals and university students etc. Now it's something that can be done by way of ministerial regulation. The exact words are, "The Minister of Finance may make regulations governing what the distribution of the money on tax-exempt properties will be." In other words, it has been made even more nebulous than it is right now.

Interjection.

Mr Gerretsen: That's what it is right now, sir. Right now, it's $75 a bed, which was —

Interjection.

Mr Gerretsen: Just a minute now. That's the way it is right now. You are going to do it by way of regulation so that it could be one amount one year and, if a government feels magnanimous, it may make it more the next year and that sort of thing. There's absolutely no certainty there at all, so it's hurting municipalities that have a lot of tax-exempt properties.

The other thing that I found very interesting in what the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay said is that another reason why we have Bill 149 here is that we're fixing some things that we did wrong in Bill 106. Bill 106 was passed less than, what, three, four, five, six months ago? We're already starting to fix things now? Why don't we give these matters sufficient thought in the first place so that we don't have to do these kind of fixings?

But of course we've seen it with the megacity 2 bill. That came two or three months after the megacity 1 bill. We've seen it with so many different acts. Why are we sitting late at night on an ongoing basis? Because we're fixing legislation that was approved in one form or another three, four, five, six months ago. What that really speaks to is that this government doesn't know what it's doing. It's got some broad ideas as to what it wants to implement, and then it goes around the province or in this House saying, "That's not really what we want to do."

Take the education bill, for example. They've already taken over $500 million out of the education system. This new bill that was talked about this afternoon is going to take another $1 billion out. Rather than them honestly saying, "That's what it's all about. We think that too much money is being expended for the public good in this province and that's why we're taking money out," all we're getting is stonewalling. "Oh no, that's not why we're doing it." The reason all the teachers and all the teachers' unions are upset has got nothing to do with Bill 160. It was such a good thing for everyone. You know why? Why are the teachers, who are on a day-to-day basis involved with our students, so against it?

The other thing people have to understand is that this is all part of a scheme to download as much responsibility on municipalities with total disregard as to whether municipalities can actually afford the downloading that's being done to them. That's really what it's all about. We already have about a $670-million download that has been — don't take my figures for it. Take the figures from all of the various mayors who have written in or all the various CAOs and all the various organizations like AMO. What do they tell you? They all tell you that you've dumped $650 million worth of services on them.

I know what the municipal councils will do after they get elected in November. They don't want to go to the people with a 10% or 20% tax increase. They know they're going to get a lot less money and they're going to have to take on a lot more services than was the case previously and they will try to whittle it down, because they've got a choice. They can either keep the service level at the same level, in which case you're probably looking at about a 10% or 15%, on the average, property tax increase in the province, or they can reduce some of those services. They will probably reduce some of those services and, of course, that's basically what you want them to do.

Why don't you just come straight up front and tell people that? Tell the people of Ontario they've got too many municipal services, that you don't think that the average taxpayer should pay for those services to the extent that they are and that's why you want to make changes, that's why you want to decrease the service levels in Ontario. But don't stonewall it by saying — what does the Premier always say? He always says, "It's revenue-neutral." Yet everybody in the province that actually deals with these figures says it isn't so.

Now we're all waiting for October 6, because the province has finally decided that it is now going to reveal the figures, at least that's what we thought until a couple of days ago. A couple of days ago we found out in a letter that was written to Hazel McCallion, mayor of Mississauga, an individual I had many pleasant dealings

with when I was involved with AMO for a number of years — she gets a letter from the minister which in effect says it may not be October 6. Hazel, being the good mayor she is, says it may be after the municipal election on November 10.

The minister for privatization knows about it and so do some of the other cabinet ministers. The deal is in. They've talked about it in the cabinet room and they've said, "Look, we're not going to tell the municipalities anything until the election is over and then everybody will be happy because they can't do anything about it, and if they're not happy, too bad for them." That's exactly what is happening.

If the province disagrees with the figures that have been presented by the municipalities with respect to the $665 million worth of downloading, why don't they produce the figures? The minister said at a committee in this Legislative Building a couple of weeks ago that he would have them on October 6, and now apparently he's not going to have them on October 6. I hope to be proven wrong on that. I hope he will come on October 6 with his figures to each municipality and say, "This is what you can rely on for your funding next year." I think we owe it to the municipal councillors, we owe it to the councils, but even more so, we owe it to the taxpayers out there. They've got a right to know whether all the different changes in funding responsibilities are going to cost them more on the property tax base.

When you add up the effects of all the downloading legislation, when you add up the effect of Bill 149 that is going to implement market value assessment even though the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said that he was going to be dead set against it and Mike Harris was not going to do that, when you put the effects of all those bills together, all I can say is the municipalities and the local taxpayers are going to be in for one heck of a shock come next year. I think that the people of Ontario can expect better than that from their government.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): Demand it.

Mr Gerretsen: And we should demand it. I think what the government would be very wise to do is to withdraw this bill and give the people of Ontario the figures as to how it will affect them.

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Mr Martin: I want to congratulate the member for Kingston and The Islands for a speech well given. He obviously comes from a background in municipal politics where he knows whence he comes.

I think it would behoove all of us in this place, when we listen to presentations made, to consider for a second where they are coming from. You get members like the member for Kingston and The Islands, who obviously has been around politics a long time at a very grass-roots level, a level that the members of the Conservative Party speak as if they come from, but I note in going through the biography of a number of the elected members from across the way that they don't have much experience in municipal politics. I would suggest that the member for Kingston and The Islands probably has as much experience under his belt as any half dozen of you over there put together.

I suggest that you listen to the member when he tells you that what's happened so far by way of the agenda of this government has not in any way been in keeping with the traditional relationship between province and municipality. It has been all one way; it has been take and no give. The bill that he was speaking to is going to do exactly that. It's going to maintain the track record. It's going to maintain the consistency in approach. In fact, as he said in his speech, we will find in the end that as the Minister for Municipal Affairs said in one of his campaign pamphlets, "My party and I will never support the imposition of MVA in Metro Toronto." He knew why he wasn't going to support the imposition of MVA, yet he's doing it now under the guise of AVA and that won't sell, that won't wash.

Mr Grimmett: I'm pleased to make some comments on the speech given by the member for Kingston and The Islands. I'm always interested in his comments as they relate to municipalities because, as the member for Sault Ste Marie said, the member for Kingston and The Islands has a wealth of municipal experience. I just want to clarify one point that he raised. Our government has never suggested that we are fixing Bill 106. What we're doing is completing the picture. Bill 106 and Bill 149 together form the basis of some serious and substantial reforms of the assessment system that are long overdue in Ontario.

I found it rather curious that the advice given by the member for Kingston and The Islands was rather typical of people who come from his party. You should be doing the things that are safe. Assessment reform is not safe. You're not going to satisfy the people whose taxes might go up by assessment changes because they'll criticize you for their taxes going up, and if people's taxes go down as a result of these assessment reforms, they'll just say, "They were too high anyway."

That is not the view of our government. Our government views assessment reform as something that's long overdue. It's a matter of equity. It's a matter of trying to make the situation fair, not only for all residential taxpayers but also the relationship between different classes of commercial and industrial taxpayers and how they relate to residential taxpayers.

Mr Gerretsen: Read the bill.

Mr Grimmett: The member wants me to read the bill, and I haven't suggested that he hasn't read the bill, but many of the comments that were made by the member give me the impression that he wants to talk about downloading. He doesn't want to talk about the bill itself, Bill 149. But again, the whole situation with the Who Does What process indicates he doesn't think we should be taking it on because there's risk involved. But we're interested in trying to restore fairness in Ontario in the relationship between the province and the municipalities.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): I too have appreciated the comments of my colleague from Kingston and The Islands, who quite clearly has a great deal of municipal experience to bring to some of the scepticism which he

has indicated tonight about a government that will not show the numbers to back up their claims that their downloading and offloading are actually going to result in no tax increase at all.

I believe the member for Kingston and The Islands is quite right to be sceptical, and I think if I'm correct in having listened to his comments, he has not had an opportunity to think about the impact of the uniform mill rate assessment for educational tax purposes. This is another area in which we have asked the Ministry of Education to show us their numbers and they will not produce any numbers to show the effect on different communities across the province of having a uniform mill rate for educational purposes in every community.

Quite clearly, when you add that in with the downloading that's being done to compensate for the fact that the government is picking up 50% of the residential taxation for education, we're going to see communities that have significant increases in their residential mill rates overall.

We don't of course know what's going to happen on the commercial side when the government starts taxing directly for education because the government doesn't even know how it's going to do that. So I guess we can't ask them to show us the numbers there since they don't have any proposal for actually levying the taxes.

It's all very ironical because of course the government's original intention with their so-called property tax reform was purely political. Once again, it has nothing to do with real reform. It had to do with a government that wanted to be able to take over educational funding in order to take $1 billion out of education. That's where it all started.

Mega-week of downloading starting with the announcement that they were going to take education off the property tax so that they could control the funding of education. They found they couldn't do that. They had to retreat. They're going to tax education directly on the property and our taxes are undoubtedly going to go up overall as a result.

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): It's a pleasure to speak to the discussion that we had here from the member for Kingston and The Islands. It would really do the government well to listen to someone who has worked at the municipal level as a council member in his city, has worked with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and of course has served as mayor of that city, because he has experience that is valuable.

What we see again and again is this government not listening to the experience of those who have been at the level of government that is being affected. We find that this government rushes into things, makes mistakes, and has to then bring forward additional bills to correct those mistakes. The member was quite right to talk about the incompetence that this government is displaying in it whole legislative program, but nowhere more particularly I think than in this whole business of the download of responsibilities and the way in which it is affecting the ability of municipalities to maintain their ability to provide services, their ability to maintain taxes at a decent level in their communities and their ability indeed to just cope with the huge influx of change that they're expected to manage in a very short period of time.

I think it would be very, very wise of the government to listen to the advice of the member for Kingston and The Islands when he tells the members of the government party that the people in his municipality, in his constituency and all across the province are not convinced that this government knows what it's doing.

Mr Gerretsen: I'd like to thank the members for Sault Ste Marie, Fort William, London Centre and Muskoka-Georgian Bay for making those comments.

Yes, I believe in equity and fairness, and the first principle of equity and fairness is that when you lay something before people, they know what the effects of that are going to be. But to do something in the abstract and hope that somehow it'll wash somewhere down the road is a totally unfair way of bringing principles and proposals forward.

Second, your comment that somehow it will bring a greater equity between residential and commercial and industrial taxpayers indicates to me that you don't know what's in the bill. The bill allows for different classes of residential properties which don't exist right now. It allows for five or six different classes of commercial and industrial properties and all of them are not related one to another, because in each one of those cases different rates of taxation can be applied, so that a municipality, if it wanted to, could almost totally ignore the market value of commercial properties vis-à-vis residential properties by applying totally different rates to them. Read the bill. I can tell you, some of your own officials were somewhat surprised by the fact that so many different classes had now been opened up, which wasn't the case before.

The point still is that the people of Ontario don't really know what you're doing in this respect because you haven't provided them with the figures that you have in hand to indicate to the average person in Ontario how this act is going to affect them on a day-to-day basis as far as their own property taxation is concerned. That's where you've failed totally.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Cochrane South.

Mr Bisson: Merci, Monsieur le Président, pour avoir la chance de participer encore dans ce débat.

I've got to say — I cannot resist that this government yet again I think is demonstrating by this bill that they really have a hard time trying to get things right. They came to this House less than a year ago with Bill 106. It was supposed to fix a whole bunch of problems, as they said, around the whole issue of assessment and a number of other issues. Apparently they got it right.

I remember back then the Mike Harris government knew everything. Everybody else was wrong. It was the fault of everybody else that there was any problems in Ontario. If there were problems, it was the NDP. If it wasn't the NDP, it was the former Liberal government, and if it wasn't the NDP and the Liberals, then it was the

fault of that bad old Bill Davis. Everybody else was wrong.

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Then they come into this House now in the fall and are dealing with Bill 149, which is — whoops — a way to fix Bill 106. Yet again you guys have demonstrated that you move too fast, you don't think through what you're about to do, you don't look at how things fit together — and that's something that I think this government needs to do a little bit more of — and quite frankly you don't take the time to get things right.

I'm amazed that a government that has such a busy agenda would really not be a little bit more ashamed of having to come into this House yet again with about the third or fourth bill where they have had to come back and fix mistakes they have made in bills they have passed before.

We just saw it when they passed the megacity bill. The government made mistakes in megacity. The New Democrats told them they made mistakes, the Liberal opposition told them they made mistakes, the people of the cities of Toronto, Scarborough, Etobicoke and all the other ones affected said they made mistakes. The people told them they made mistakes. "Oh, no. We know better. We're going to do what has to be done because we're the Mike Harris government. We've got it right. We're smart. Everybody else doesn't know what they're talking about." Whoops, they slipped up again. They messed up the megacity and they had to come back with another bill to fix some of the problems on the megacity.

Again, we see it in Bill 149. It's another one of the "whoops" bills that they're bringing into this Legislature because they don't take time to do it right.

Today my colleague the member for Hamilton Centre asked a question of the Minister of Labour around Bill 136, that huge bill with which they wanted to take away a whole bunch of bargaining rights from municipal employees and people who work for the MUSH sector within government. The government is rushing through on 150 pages of amendments. They want to get that done in lickety-split time. I saw in amazement the minister stand up today and say: "Oh, no, opposition, you guys shouldn't worry about the details. Just trust us, because this is going to work. You guys just worry too much about details."

This assembly, the process of legislation passing through it and the way we deal with bills in committee is all about detail. It's about making sure we get things right. We have to remember that in this assembly there is a role for the government to pass legislation and to govern on behalf of the people of Ontario, and we in the opposition are here to criticize when the government does something bad and to try to make amendments to legislation to make it work for the people of Ontario.

But there's a problem with the equation. The government thinks only they are right, everybody else is wrong, and if there are problems in the world, it's everybody else but them. It doesn't have to be that way. We can't return to a time in this province when this assembly worked in a way that both the opposition parties and the government of the day, under Bob Rae or David Peterson or Mr Davis or Mr Grossman, when opposition parties and government worked together to a certain degree to try to make bills right. I remember sitting on the government side on a number of bills that we passed, and I had responsibility as parliamentary assistant or as a committee member, when opposition members used to come forward and say, "Listen, you guys have messed up there, there's a problem," and you know what? We used to fix some of those problems.

But the only time this government moves is when there is huge political opposition to it, such as they had with Bill 136, when they feel that the polls tell them, those rolling polls that they call every night, that they can't survive the fight, and then they hurry back to do a bunch of amendments on their legislation, as they did with Bill 136. That ain't good enough. That's not how government is supposed to be run. Government is supposed to be run by a bunch of people who take the time to get things right, and yet again, this government has got things wrong. If I were the House leader for the government, I would be somewhat embarrassed to come into this assembly with yet another one of those "whoops" bills.

Let's take a look at what they're doing here. The other part of this bill, other than fixing up the mistakes that are in Bill 106, is supposedly creating something new. What do they call it again? Is it "current value assessment" or "actual value assessment"?

Mr Martin: It doesn't matter.

Mr Bisson: Exactly. The member for Sault Ste Marie makes the point, "It doesn't matter." The reality is that this government is allowing market value assessment under another name to be assessed in the city of Toronto and other communities where market value assessment doesn't operate.

If the Conservatives of the day, at the time the third party, the now government, had taken a consistent position when they were in opposition with what they do in government, I would say, "They campaigned on it, they said they'd do it, and they're doing it," but they're not. I was on the other side of the House when our Minister of Municipal Affairs brought in a bill that introduced market value assessment to the city of Toronto. Mr Speaker, you were here, and you will remember the cries. You were part of that caucus that denounced the former NDP government for having brought forward market value assessment. And you know who else helped you, Mr Speaker? Mike Harris, the now Premier of Ontario, Chris Stockwell, the now Speaker, and a whole bunch of other Tory caucus members who are now in cabinet stood in this House and said, "We denounce the Bob Rae government for having introduced MVA to the city of Toronto."

The Tories said they were credible and honest people, which they are, I can't argue that, but there's a bit of a difference between the position they took then and the one they take now.

We, the Bob Rae government, at the time when we introduced MVA through our Minister of Municipal Affairs, listened to the cries of the opposition because they raised

points that were real. If the Bob Rae government had introduced MVA to the city of Toronto, municipal taxes for residents in the downtown core would have hit the roof and, more importantly, those people that have rights of way, like the rail stations, in and about the city of Toronto would have ended up having to pay a huge amount of assessment that they'd never had to pay before. Quite frankly, it would have chased a lot of business out of Toronto.

The residents at the time, along with the business owners, organized with the opposition to put pressure on the Bob Rae government and we backed down. We said: "Okay, we understand. MVA was something that was asked for by a certain group of people within Toronto. We thought at the time it made some sense, but on further reflection, it's wrong. We withdraw." We took our lumps, and quite frankly we paid for some of those things in the last election.

But this government now comes to this House in their first term as a government, after having come out of being the third party, and have completely flipped their position. They're now saying, "We're going to introduce actual value assessment. No, it's not MVA. No, not us. We're opposed to MVA. We're going to introduce actual value assessment," or current value assessment or whatever you want to call it.

What's the difference between current or actual value assessment and MVA? Market value assessment assesses a building on the basis of the market: How much can that building fetch in the market? Current value assessment assesses the value of the building based on the current value of the building, which is based on the market. There's no difference. MVA and current value are the same thing.

I see my friend across the way, the government member, sort of snickering. I'd be snickering a little bit too if I was on that side of the House having to wear this one. You weren't a member of that third party caucus that made these arguments when we were the government. The reality is you're bringing MVA into the city of Toronto and you know what the effect is going to be. It'll mean a number of property owners in the city of Toronto will see their taxes go up. Yes, some will go down; we know that. There are some property owners who will come out on the positive side of this, but there are many more who are going to end up paying much more tax than they're paying now.

You can argue all you want, "We want to make it fair." How is it fair that somebody pays $1,100 taxes and the other person pays $2,200 taxes? It comes down to a real simple principle: If you've been paying $1,100 and your taxes go up by $1,000, an increase is an increase is an increase, and you guys are increasing the taxes, period. Don't argue fairness. It has nothing to do with fairness.

The other point is — and I want to make this because the parliamentary assistant made the point well. He talked about needing to ensure that we're able to apply a standard when it comes to applying assessment on people who have rights of way in municipalities. That's fair.

Mr Speaker, you know what it's going to mean as well as I do. First of all, because of this bill, municipalities, because they're now going to have to cope with all of the costs of the downloading, will have the ability to charge assessment against property that has rights of way, like rail stations and others. Some would argue they should pay their fair share of taxes. I'm not opposed to that. I think everybody should pay their fair share and everybody should pay their own way. But what it's going to mean in a lot of cases is that some of these businesses are going to start looking around at how to get rid of that property or how to reduce their liability when it comes to taxes by pulling out of entire communities. In most cases it's going to mean that their businesses will pay more taxes. I thought this government was in favour of helping business. This has nothing to do with helping business.

The other thing that it does — I've got to say this. On the whole issue of market value assessment, not only did the third party, the Conservatives of the day, rail against MVA and didn't want to see MVA introduced; a number of candidates in the last provincial election ran on platforms they and their party, meaning the Conservative Party of Ontario, would not introduce MVA to the people of the city of Toronto.

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Who had that in their election leaflets? None other than the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Honourable Al Leach, the member who is carrying this bill. How can he bring this bill into the House and have the gall to do so when his own election platform, in his own leaflet it said, "My party and I will never support the imposition of market value assessment in Metro Toronto." Period. "Never" is underlined. The people who voted for him said: "Oh, we believe him. Al Leach ran the TTC. We've got to believe what he says. We know the TTC always runs on time, so Al Leach's word has got to be his bond."

You know what? He made another promise in the last election. He is the Minister of Municipal Affairs, is he not? He said he wasn't going to scrap rent control. He was going to strengthen it, along with a whole bunch of other cabinet ministers in the Metro area who ran on the same platform and the same promise. They put it inside their election leaflets, and what did they do? They broke their word to the people who elected them. The people thought they were electing somebody who was opposed to MVA, somebody who was opposed to getting rid of rent control. These people did a flip-flop, did an about-face and turned exactly the opposite way and ran into the arms of Mike Harris and are saying, "To heck with my constituents, to heck with my promises, I'll do what I have to do to keep my cabinet post."

At one point you will be accountable, and I think that time will come in the next provincial election.

I have to say, especially when it comes to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr Leach, I don't dislike him. Al is not a bad guy. I was municipal affairs critic for a little bit better than a year when we came back in 1995, and I kind of like Al. He's kind of a nice guy. He's a regular kind of Joe in his own way; he's got more money than I. He's

pretty easy to get along with, but I have to ask myself the question, does this guy want to run again? He certainly demonstrates to me that he has no inclination whatsoever of wanting to get re-elected in his riding because there's no way in heck that guy could get re-elected. He couldn't even get elected as the dog catcher in his riding, given what he has done in about-faces when it comes to MVA, when it comes to rent control and when it comes to everything else he's done. He used to run the biggest transit authority in Canada and is one of the ministers responsible for decreasing the funding to that very same transit authority and making it less sustainable as far as being able to provide the level of service that people are accustomed to.

Let's look at a couple of other things this bill does. It eliminates the business occupancy tax. On the surface, everybody is opposed to having to pay less tax, but you know what? I kind of like this. I like the idea that businesses are not going to be assessed this tax on the surface, but you start to think about what it means. There's a whole bunch of things that I like to do but I might not go out and do them because there are consequences to those actions.

It's the same thing when it comes to the elimination of the business occupancy tax. You're going to go to municipalities in Ontario and say, "You're not to levy the business occupancy tax any more." That means a person who is renting a storefront pays the business occupancy tax. In the future, because of this bill, boom, it's gone. "It sounds like a good thing. Hey, everybody likes that. We pay no taxes." But you know what? It means that municipalities are going to lose — listen to this — $1.6 billion of assessment, $1.6 billion on top of all of the municipal download the province is throwing down to the municipalities, downloading transit responsibility, downloading housing, downloading ambulance services, downloading whatever. There's nothing that is not being downloaded. They're going to lose $1.6 billion in assessment by the loss of the business occupancy tax.

The government says: "There's no problem. We're just going to let the municipalities deal with this. We're going to give them the stuff in the bill here to make sure they can make it up somehow." How do you think they're going to make it up? You and I, the property taxpayers. How do you think they're going to make it up? Money doesn't grow on trees. This government seems to think that money grows on trees for municipalities and that somehow or other municipal politicians grab a shovel and go into a little hole and they dig up millions of dollars and they pay their bills. I'm sorry, it doesn't work that way. I would think the Conservative Party would be one that understands economic issues.

The reality is that the people in the cities and towns across this province are going to see their property taxes go up. This government is not only downloading responsibilities on to them, they're not only cutting municipal transfer payments, such as the northern support grant in northern Ontario and other grants all across the province, they're also getting rid of certain assessments. Municipalities are going to have to make that up.

What do you think Barbara Hall is going to have to do in the city of Toronto come the next election, or whoever runs in the city of North Bay or Sudbury or Sault Ste Marie or Timmins or Sarnia? What are they going to have to do? They're going to have to pay for the services or get rid of them. Most municipal politicians are like you and me: They want to make sure their communities are safe. That means they need fire departments, they need police services, they have to have water and sewer plants that are running efficiently. They've got to plow the snow off the streets. They've got to operate the arena so their kids can go and play and hockey on Saturday afternoon. They've got to make sure the pool works so that you're able to go out and keep in shape and stay out of the health care system — something maybe I should do more often — but they're not going to have the money to do so.

Those municipal politicians, come the next municipal election, afterwards into the next budget year, are going to have to say: "Do we close the pool? Do we close the arena? Do we stop plowing the streets? Do we not pay for ambulance services? Do we cut the day care? Do we raise property taxes?" I think it's going to be a combination of both. There is going to be some reduction in services, there's no question, because in most municipalities it means, if they were to offload the entire cost of the municipal download and loss of assessment and loss of transfers to the property taxpayers, that their taxes would go up by 40% and 50%. There's no council in Ontario, no alderman or mayor or councillor, who wants to see that kind of tax increase.

What do you think they're going to do? They're going to go and cut your services: You will have less police; you will have fewer firefighters; you will plow less often; you will pick up less garbage; your sewer plants are not going to be as modern as they should be; when roads have potholes, they're not going to fix them as fast; and your property taxes are going to go up.

These guys ran on the promise that there's only one taxpayer. Do you remember that? I remember it. It's called the Common Sense Revolution: "Call 1-800-903-Mike and you can get your copy of this." It says, "Historically, municipalities have responded to provincial funding limits by simply increasing local property taxes." What's different? What do you think they're going to do after the next election? Grow money on trees? I don't think so. I think they're going to cut services and they will raise property taxes.

The solemn promise of the then third party in the Common Sense Revolution is: "We will work closely with municipalities to ensure that any actions we take will not result in increases to local property taxes." You tell me how you're going to do that. You tell the council of the city of Timmins or the town of Iroquois Falls or Black River-Matheson or Kapuskasing or Hearst or Toronto how in heck they're going to achieve that. When you say they are going to have to take on all these new responsibilities, you're going to take assessment away from them

as far as business occupancy tax and the farm tax rebate, and they're not going to raise property taxes. How are you going to do that?

You are by this very bill, Bill 149, allowing municipalities to create new subclasses when it comes to assessment: six new subclasses in residential, and I think it's an equal amount, six in the industrial-commercial sector. If you don't want them raising property taxes, why are you allowing them to create new subclasses when it comes to assessment if you don't want them to use them? If you didn't want them to use them, you would have said, "We're not creating any subclasses." But you're creating them. What does that tell us? It tells us you're giving the power to municipalities to go out and raise property taxes.

We have a responsibility in this assembly. We have to make sure that our kids end up in the future inheriting the same Ontario we had. When this government cuts everything the way they have, we're not able to ensure that our kids will inherit a system of education or a system of health care or a system of municipal services. It is our responsibility in this House as the opposition, as the New Democrats, to make sure that tomorrow our kids have a future. With this bill I don't think they're going to have a very good tomorrow.

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister without Portfolio [Privatization]): I listened very intently, as I try to do, to the debate in the House and the member for Cochrane South speaking to us I think with some background in municipal politics. I don't know all of his CV but I think he has some involvement in municipal politics. I found quite intriguing the realization about three quarters of the way through his debate today that he has now realized that money does not grow on trees. On behalf of the many taxpayers in my riding who encouraged me to become involved in politics and gave me the chance to stand in this House and speak, I say it is unfortunate that his revelation that money does not grow on trees did not occur on or about 1990, before he took this province on a rampage of spending at the expense of the taxpayer and burdened many of the taxpayers, both young and old in this province, in my riding and also in his, because I think he does have taxpayers in his riding, with this tremendous debt problem.

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The debate about MVA, by the way, I find quite intriguing as well. I didn't have the luxury of being in this House when that topic was raised by your then government. I was outside of this chamber as an ordinary citizen. I do recall, though, that when I heard the issue raised by the Bob Rae government, the basic principle of their particular position at that time was to try to create some equality within tax classes, especially on the residential side, the very same reason, by the way, that we are standing here in this House encouraging the government of the day to proceed with some assessment that does make sense on a residential basis.

The member also spoke briefly about reassessment issues and how that will impact the taxpayer, and I think that was leveraging off the discussion of the member for Kingston and The Islands. I would encourage the member for Cochrane South to take a look at the history that the member for Kingston and The Islands spoke to. He will find that it was within the jurisdiction, the authority of that then council to be able to deal with the tax increase by lowering the mill rate, and they didn't. They kept the tax win.

Mr Caplan: I listened to the words of the member for Cochrane South with great interest. He indicated that it's possible that taxes would go down. I can tell the members, and any Metro members of the government or opposition caucuses would well know, that on the basis of the 1988 market value study, those properties which would see tax reductions under this bill have already been appealed. So the individuals who would enjoy any kind of tax relief — there are none. The only people who are going to be affected will see their taxes go up, and go up significantly. This has escaped attention and I'm really surprised that the government members from the Metro area would not point out this flaw in the bill.

Mr Gerretsen: Particularly the minister without portfolio.

Mr Caplan: The government House leader, for one, the Attorney General, many of the others would want to point that out and to be a voice for the people who live in their communities. I know I certainly am committed to that, because it was very clear to me as I knocked on doors in Oriole this past summer that the tax burden that this government is committed to putting on people who live in my community is unbearable and untenable. I must say that it is just totally devastating to a community, particularly one in Metropolitan Toronto, and I really think that there needs to be some thought and some rethinking about what the impact of this is going to be.

I would say one further thing to the members. Why is the government afraid to share any numbers? They keep pushing back the dates when we'll have numbers ready for the municipalities because they know that the impact of this bill and the other measure on property taxes, Bill 106, will in fact be devastating.

Mr Martin: I also want to be on the record this evening in congratulating the member for Cochrane South for the excellent presentation he made here, pointing out to all of us and to the folks listening out there the inconsistencies in this government's track record: what they said during the election, what they said in the Common Sense Revolution, and then the flip-flops, particularly by the minister who is handling this piece of legislation. That seems to be becoming his trademark. I think the member is absolutely right. He must have absolutely no intention of running again, because anybody out there in his constituency who knows of his record, who's been watching him at all, must be asking themselves what in the world they did and why the person they trusted so much with their vote has now turned around and has begun to sell them this bill of goods that at the end of the day is not going to serve them well, is not going to serve anybody across this province well.

He makes the point as well that this piece of legislation is consistent with so many other pieces of legislation that

have been brought before this House. At first blush, from the name even, you'd think it was going to be something wonderful and progressive and evolutionary. At the end of the day when you go through it and you begin to take a sharp pencil in that exercise, you begin to see that instead of gaining, instead of winning, instead of advancing, the taxpayer out there — and he says, quite rightly, there is only one taxpayer — is the one who's going to get hit two and three and four times.

I'm also supportive of his position that this government as well is very good at passing the blame, blaming somebody else, pointing fingers. I've got two letters here, two constituents who have the federal government as the bogeyman —

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Grimmett: I'd like to make some comments on the speech given by the member for Cochrane South. With his usual enthusiasm, he's discussed a number of issues in the bill and of course quite a number of issues that weren't mentioned in the bill. I would like to comment again on the rights of way issue.

I'm sure in his part of the province where he lives there's a significant interest in this issue because there would be a lot of owners of rights of way. Ontario Hydro and utilities and railways would be affected by this issue. I think it's important for the public to recognize that under the system we had when we came into power in Ontario there were great inconsistencies from one jurisdiction to another in the treatment of these rights of way. Some jurisdictions treated them as one category of property and then right next door there could be a municipality or another jurisdiction that treated them totally differently. The owners of these properties were looking for consistency. They didn't want to keep dealing with the inconsistency. They wanted us to address this issue.

What we're proposing in Bill 149 is that the province would take control of the rates on these rights of way, that we would do it on an acreage basis and that we would set up nine geographical areas in the province. We would give some assurance to the municipalities that they're going to continue to have a strong revenue stream from these properties, and we wanted to give assurance to the owners of these properties that they weren't going to run into difficulties forecasting the cost that they would have to be paying the municipalities for tax assessment.

I think Bill 149 is very sensitive in the way that it deals with that important issue, which is very important to the people of Timmins. But it's also important that the owners of these properties be given the assurance that they can continue to operate in Ontario without fear that they're going to go from one year to the next with an impossible increase in their tax rates. Those are the issues that we had to deal with on rights of way.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Cochrane South, two minutes.

Mr Bisson: To the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, I find it very interesting that as a member of the Conservative government you would say you want to make sure that those people who have rights of way, such as utilities or gas companies or whatever it might be, have some assurance that their taxes aren't going to go up too much and they're going to be able to afford to operate in Ontario. Mr Speaker, you were in the House with me when Bill 26 was passed, and Bill 26 allowed municipalities to go out and annex, or do whatever you want to call it, take over unorganized communities or other communities into their own tax base. In our communities in and around the area of Timmins, Iroquois Falls and Matheson, Iroquois Falls came very close to annexing part of the municipality, part of the area around the municipality. Why? Because they would have been able to get at the assessment of TransCanada Pipelines. It would have meant an increase of $1.5 million in assessment.

For this government member to say you want to make sure the business community has a stable situation when it comes to how property taxes are applied to their businesses and to their property, your first bill — as the former Speaker used to call it, your first ominous bill — made darned sure that municipalities had the ability to go out and grab extra assessment. As it turned out, Mayor Ken Graham and his council in Iroquois Falls backed down, because they recognized that this was not a good idea at the time and the government was basically making them do their dirty work for them. The point is, you're the government that's really causing these inequities.

To the member for Mississauga West across the way, who says we just came to the realization that money doesn't grow on trees and, "Where were you in the time that you were in government?" I only say, when it comes to taxes, when it comes to the increase in municipal taxes, remember what you just said in this House, because in fact you're going to be making sure that property taxes are increased to the municipal taxpayers of this province and they're going to find out that money doesn't grow on trees.

2000

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand up and speak about Bill 149. When the government came to power, when we started campaigning, when Doug Rollins started campaigning in the area of Quinte, there was a concern out there that people around the province needed some balance between who pays a heavy amount of tax and who pays a little amount of tax.

I think this government has seen fit to try to bring some evenness throughout the whole system, and it's not an easy chore to do. As the previous speaker said, when they started to bring a fair market value tax into Metropolitan Toronto, they seemed to get a lot of heat. All of a sudden they decided, "The heat is going to be a little bit too much and we should back down from it," so they decided the best thing to do was just forget it and scrap it.

I think most people in the province had to realize that people who have a small house, whether it's just out of Kanata or a house in London or a house in Elliot Lake, should be paying somewhere close to the same amount of assessment to start with and then they could bring it into

the tax. This bill goes together with Bill 106 to make sure that can happen.

In this bill we put in some different categories to help out, and one of the areas we have helped out is the people who are on a fixed income and people who have a disability. Those people who have a disability are going to be given the opportunity to defer their taxes, to make sure those taxes don't increase. Our municipalities are going to have the opportunity to bring that in over a period of approximately eight years if they see fit. I think that will allow a lot of people in Ontario to slowly get to the point where fairness in assessment of property should be even, regardless of where they live in the province, and at least pay tax accordingly in the same category.

As a businessman for 30 years of my life, there was always a tax bill for business occupancy tax. There aren't too many people who haven't thought that the business occupancy tax was awfully hard as far as business was concerned. I can tell you, on the first day you opened that business and said, "Holy jeepers, I'm in business," you turned the key, and the first guy who was there was the tax collector, particularly for business tax. He was the very first one who came there. In fact, he came there sometimes before the mailman did. He got there and wanted that bill paid. He wanted that paid right now. "Give me that money."

For a lot of big corporations, that business occupancy tax probably is of little or no importance, but to a little individual like Doug Rollins or a little place that has a small business, that money means an awful lot, and right off the bat that has to be paid out. Now we're going to be able to take that money off the tax and allow that businessman to have a little breathing room and not have to pay that business occupancy tax right at the start.

I know we hear a lot of noise from the other side sometimes that it doesn't feel that's exactly right, but I think we've got to be able to get that. They continually say that we're going to roll the actual value assessment into a three-year average to make sure property that is valued at that amount of money — that in a three-year period those people will be able to roll that assessment in together.

All of a sudden people talk about mill rates, and a lot of people don't understand mill rates. It's nice for the member from Kingston because he was a mayor and he understands mill rates, but there are hundreds and hundreds of people in Ontario who do not understand when you start talking mill rates. If you put it in as a percentage of tax, then they understand it, but they don't understand it as a mill rate.

I think these are the kinds of things we're going to be able to simplify, to balance the playing field and make sure that people are equally treated. It's only fair that everybody in Ontario should be equally dealt with, regardless of whether they are in downtown Toronto, downtown London, Elliot Lake, Thunder Bay or wherever it is. I think everybody wants to be on the same level playing field. Yes, there will be some taxes that go up —

Mr Bisson: Equity doesn't mean you all get treated the same.

Mr Rollins: That's right, it doesn't mean they will all get the same, but it starts out at the same. You cannot try to get an even start if you have some up there and some down here. You all have to start at the line together. By making assessment level across the province, it will certainly help to make the raising of taxes start from the same place.

One of the other areas in this bill that we've dealt with is theatres. I know in our little town of Belleville we've got a small playhouse on Pinnacle Street. It's a non-profit organization, very, very small. Yes, we need to have an improvement. We've got BCI down there —

Mr Bisson: Doug, one of these.

Mr Rollins: Don't worry.

BCI has just looked at bringing in an arts centre. I think if we develop that into an arts centre and a cultural centre, it will hold somewhere around 1,000 people. If that piece of property is exempt from taxes, as it can be under Bill 149, that will allow it to be developed, and some people, who may start out in acting and dancing, that kind of career, and the extra hours of activity that those people put in, could make themselves a lifestyle. I want to be very proud to be part of a government that has seen fit to have the foresight to allow those people to have exemptions.

Charitable organizations also should be dealt with under the Fair Municipal Finance Act. We know who they are in our community. Our members of council will be able to categorize them and give them the exemption of not having to pay tax so that those people will not have to go back to the same tax people in their city hall and ask for donations to run. They will be given the opportunity to keep those places without paying taxes on them. Those are the kinds of things we need to have.

We also have to look at farm lands, particularly the underdeveloped lands that are sitting there. We see them all around our small towns. I was in Trenton on Saturday and looked at an industry, and right at the edge of that industry where they just put a little development there's a corn field. There aren't too many farmers that close to Trenton; however, that land is being used for corn production. It's going to be developed before very long into industrial land. It can be adjusted under those tax conditions so it will encourage some people to make sure they keep that land productive in agriculture until such time as they have to put it into development. As soon as it goes into development, certainly the meter runs a lot faster on the tax bill on developed land than it does when it's on land that is being taxed on a farm basis, because the lowest amount of tax is what it's going to be taxed at.

One of the other payments we have are payments in lieu of tax. This is an absolute nightmare across the whole province, in every municipality, every council, whoever has the strongest council to argue about what they have to pay. It's a little bit like a wildfire, because if all of a sudden in Kingston they get paid X number of dollars for having a prison or a school or something that's run by the government in lieu of taxes, they hear about that in Trenton or they hear about it in Sault Ste Marie or Sudbury and they want the same kind of dollars. It's just continual

with no continuity of where it's brought in. I think this will make it a little bit fairer. It will bring it into a little more level playing field.

One of the other things, as the speaker before me from Muskoka-Georgian Bay mentioned is about rights of way. Any of the companies that pertain to rights of way, whether it's Bell Telephone, Hydro, the railroad, the gas companies, certainly want some continuity as far as the dollars in taxes that are paid across the province. I think when the province starts to set those rates, those rates will be equal. They will not have the opportunity to increase in a municipality in Hastings county and then go to Renfrew or some place like that where they might be a lot cheaper or a lot lower. That company realizes, when it has X number of miles of railroad or X number of square hectares of right of way, those people will basically be paying the same tax on it. Once again, it just levels the playing field. We have to have the playing field as level as possible for the taxpayers, the tax collectors and everybody in the whole system.

2010

We have heard some concerns from time to time that taxes are going to be raised. Yes, there's no question that some people have had a lot less taxes to pay over the last few years. Some people could say that they had a free ride. I don't say it's a free ride, but they had a ride that they haven't been paying the fair freight on. Those people are going to be asked to bring the tax bill up to it. I think that's only fair. Most people in the province of Ontario want to be dealt with fairly. They're not asking for a free ride; they're asking to be dealt with, as far as fairness is concerned, in the even amount of taxes that they have put in.

There are some other properties that are owned by municipalities that have got to be dealt with in a little bit different category. We've got six categories of properties that we've got to put in. I know the different business categories that have to be dealt with. When there are different businesses, they are different circumstances that they're under and they must be taxed more fairly so those people can compete on the open and the global market and they are not overtaxed as far as the amount of dollars and taxes they have to pay, because those companies are the same people who, if we keep the tax dollars from being eroded away from them and deal with them fairly, are going to hire workers and keep the payrolls going on.

I stood in amazement here and listened — and I know over the time we do listen to some things that happen from across the road — and the speakers from over there continually say that we're going too fast. I'm awfully glad that they didn't go any faster over the previous five years before we got elected. The only speed that there was then was the size of the debt, where it started out and where it ended up at. That was at an awful fast rate. I wish we could take it down as fast as they were putting it up. We would really accomplish a fantastic amount of things.

We are trying to take those taxes down; we are trying to look after that deficit and maybe, before the five years is up, we will get back on to a balanced budget and start paying down some of those dollars that were — I wouldn't say "squandered," but not spent wisely while we were on the other side of the House.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Durham Centre): Say "squandered."

Mr Rollins: You did say they squandered some. I think maybe some of it was a little bit on the squandered side. The people of this province who have dug in and done a lot of taxpaying over their days, when they get a little bit older in life, want to stay in their house and not be forced out because their tax bill is going to be raised too much. We have put a provision in there to make sure those people can take their time, back up their taxes a little bit —

Mr Gerretsen: And incur debt. It's a nice legacy you're leaving people.

Mr Rollins: It's a nice legacy to leave. When you leave this world I suspect even a gold credit card isn't going to help out some of those members from the other side. They probably won't stand the heat either. You've got to look after those people who have little in life and not be quite so bad about that. They'll stand a lot of heat. A lot of ours will handle the heat.

The biggest fairness of this is to make sure that the municipalities are given the tools that they want to be able to make some adjustments among the commercial sectors and to make sure that our commercial class — that they can adjust those tax brackets. When you see the councils sit down and bring out their budgets, they're going to have a way of being able to fairly deal with the conditions that they're under.

Yes, they're going to have to sharpen their pencils and do a good job on it, there's no question about that. There are going to have to be some concerns for the people who are less fortunate than some others and who cannot afford to cover that. But all of those things relate to one thing in Bill 149: the fairness to make sure that these taxes are met with fairness throughout the province, not just within the municipalities but throughout the province. We have to start from a good foundation. A lot of the things in the government that we're trying to do, the foundation has to start from a fair, even, well-balanced assessment. That's where it's got to start.

I know as a kid going back in my younger life — and that's going back quite a little way, probably back further than some of my colleagues from across the road — I can remember my grandfather was an assessor. He was a good guy. He was an assessor in the township of Thurlow. It was amazing even as a young child, probably 12 or 13 years old, when my grandfather used to assess, they went all up and down the township and assessed the roads, the different stories he told when they were assessing of how poor the place looked and one thing and another and then "Don't raise the taxes."

In those days two or three people walked in from the street and took a look at the place and said: "You've got a nice house here and you've got a nice barn and you've got a pretty good-sized business. We see last year you were assessed at so much. Should we assess you at something different?" I can never get it through my head that some-

thing was worth maybe, in those days, $10,000 or $12,000 as far as the value of the place was concerned and they were arguing over an assessment number of $2,500 or $2,100. It took me a long time — maybe I'm a slow learner —to be able to figure out that the assessment had no relative value tied to the actual value of the property. There was always that fluctuating point in there.

The thing was that many, many of those taxpayers couldn't figure out why the guy next door who had supposedly just about as nice a house, maybe a little bit bigger barn, was paying $200 or $300 less in taxes than that guy. They came to find out, maybe with their friend the assessor —

Mr Gerretsen: Maybe one was a Tory and the other wasn't.

Mr Rollins: Maybe one was voting on the other side of the fence — that might well have been — and that is not fair. That has nothing to do with the ability to pay taxes or what their property value is. This is trying to bring back some level of continuity into it so that the people of Ontario can look at it and, with assurance, feel that they are getting a fair deal as far as their tax bill is concerned. A fair deal is that it's an actual value assessment.

Yes, that adjustment is going to be allowed to be rolled in on a three-year average, so when those people look at their assessment bill, they can relate those dollars right to their tax bill without worrying about whether you've got a lot of assessment on to it. The prime and key thing is that everybody should be even. If you start out with an assessment that is even — I'm sure we can get the value brought back to where it's even. Whether it be in downtown Toronto or downtown Belleville or wherever it is, people with the same value of place should be assessed close to the same value, within a three-year average. Then we can address the problem of fair taxes not only for just one place in the province but from parts all over this province.

I do wonder a little bit, when you see some of these other people saying: "We thought of doing that and then we backed off. We decided the people were crying." Lots of times, when people start in hollering and cry too loud, all of a sudden, yes, they're getting close to something that's right. I'm awfully glad to think that we've got enough fortitude and foresight to, as a government, make sure that the actual value assessment does get put into place and that some day in the future somebody will say, "Wasn't it nice that they fixed the problem that started years and years ago in this province and nobody had the backbone to sit in there and make it fair and make it happen."

With the support of Bill 149 and with the fairness that it will bring to the taxpayers of Ontario — yes, there will be some who say that taxes went up; but likewise there will be some who say that the taxes went down. We've got to look after those people. We've got to make sure that our companies and our industry are clearly enough assessed that we can make sure we're competitive not only in Ontario but also in Canada and also on the global market. We've got to make sure that everybody pays their fair share; nobody gets away with a complete free ride, but everybody pays their fair share. That's what this bill is all about: fair assessment.

Mr Gerretsen: It's hard to know where to start with this member. I like him as a member; he's a good neighbour up Belleville way. But he somehow leaves the impression that once we reassess all the properties, whether they're actual value or market value, clear across the province, then we're all going to be paying the same amount of taxes. What he forgets is that in order to come at your actual property taxes, you have to do two things: You have to assess the property and you apply a mill rate to the assessment. You multiply the two and you get the tax bill. That's how you get it.

2020

Listening to him, you would think this exercise is all about everybody in Ontario somehow paying the same amount of money. Well, he is dead wrong, because if one municipality has a high tax rate, they're going to be paying higher taxes based on the same assessment than another municipality. When you add into that mix the fact that this legislation allows you to set up different classes within, let's say, a commercial assessment — you can have, I think, four or five different classes, and the same thing within the residential assessment — you in effect can have about two or three or four different tax rates, different amounts of taxes that are going to be charged in the municipality.

So don't make it sound as if you're for fairness and equity. We're all in favour of fairness and equity. What we're saying is that this bill doesn't necessarily do it, particularly when you add on top of this that one of the services the province has downloaded is the assessment function. The province used to do it and it was done in a fair manner. Whether or not it's going to be done in a fair manner locally, clear across this province, is debatable, because remember, that's the reason it was taken away from the municipalities in the first place, about 25 years ago.

Mr Bisson: The member for Quinte certainly gave what I thought was an interesting perspective as to this debate. I want to touch on three points. On one of his logical points he went for about five minutes and it led us to the following conclusion: If everybody is mad at you, you must be doing something right. Well, I'll tell you, I've been around politics, like most people in this Assembly, for a little while, and the whole purpose of politics is to be able to govern effectively so that you don't get a bunch of people mad at you.

Everybody knows that, being government, there will always be somebody mad at you, because you don't always, with every decision you make, please everybody, and that's not my point here. But for this member to somehow say that when everybody is mad at you, you're doing something right — boy, I'd love to be at some of those caucus meetings. What are they telling these guys? It's really scary. "Don't worry, guys. They're all mad at us. Everything's fine. We're doing great. Hey Mike, the teachers. Hey Mike, the municipal councillors. Hey, what about the firemen? What about the police? What about the

ambulance drivers? What about the women? What about the children? They're all mad at us, so we've got to be doing something right."

What logic. I'll tell you, those caucus meetings must be really, really something.

The other point he makes is that taxes will go up and taxes will go down, but you have to remember that more taxes will go down than will go up. Take a look at study after study that has been done on this whole issue of MVA, because this is MVA for anything other than the word. The number of appeals that you're going to get when you introduce this system of actual value, current value, market value assessment, whatever you want to call it, is going to be in the neighbourhood of around 600,000 appeals. That tells me that you've got a big problem on your hands. The reality is that what you're handing municipalities is a ticking time bomb.

I'd really love to get invited to one of your caucus meetings. It must be fun.

Mr Grimmett: I am pleased to add my two cents worth of comments on the speech by the member for Quinte. I wanted to talk about some of the issues that he brought up, especially relating to small-town theatres and how the member for Quinte was indicating that there was a great benefit in Bill 149 to small-town theatres.

In my riding there are a number of small-town theatres that would benefit greatly from this provision. There's a theatre in Port Carling, there's a theatre in Gravenhurst, there's one in Huntsville, and I know the member for Quinte has several theatres in his riding too. They always have difficulty maintaining a year-round bank account. How can they pay their taxes on a year-round basis when they can't even maintain a bank account through the seasonal period that they operate?

Bill 149 indicates that where municipalities wish to do so, they can exempt small live theatres. This has a very significant impact on a small community.

As many people know, our government is very, very close with the arts community and we're very concerned about the arts community. So we have taken special efforts in Bill 149 to deal not only with the small-town theatres but also the theatres in Toronto. As many people would know, Toronto has the third-largest live theatre audience in the world — the third-largest live theatre audience in the world in our theatres in Toronto.

We want to maintain the theatres in small-town Ontario; we also want to assist the theatres in Toronto to be competitive with their counterparts in other parts of the world. So what we've come up with is a competitive way for these theatres to be treated when it comes to assessment. We're going to make sure that the not-for-profit operations get the same tax treatment as the public theatres, and then the private theatres also. They all get dealt with in the same manner. It's all very clear.

Mr Gravelle: It's so interesting listening to the member for Quinte and all of the other government members who have been speaking this evening. They talk about fairness. They talk about fairness all the time and it's hard to imagine what could possibly be fair about a piece of legislation that essentially asks people to accept at face value that things are going to work out a certain way. Why won't they release the studies that show what impact these proposed changes are going to have on local property taxpayers? It's not fair if you don't do that. That's a minimum.

What's fair about moving so quickly with all their legislation that they frequently now have to come back and fix a previous bill up? They've got to fix the bill up. Surely that should be a message to the government members themselves. If you've got to fix a bill up, something is wrong. There's nothing fair about that.

What's fair about all the downloading that's taking place in the municipalities — the downloading of social housing, the downloading of ground ambulance services, the downloading of public health — when indeed it was advised by their own Crombie commission that these are things they shouldn't do?

When one looks at some of the issues in finer detail, such as public health, you see a Minister of Health who acknowledges potentially that genetic health counselling, for example, which is important in northern Ontario and needs to be maintained, is something they say they will maintain, yet we have not yet seen the proof of that and we've got to push it. There's nothing fair about that.

There's nothing fair about taking away the municipal support grant; $666 million taken away. There's nothing fair about that. They say it's all going to work out. You know, you look at a city like Thunder Bay; that's $20 million taken away. That's before the downloading. So you take away $20 million and then another $19 million, and you've got a huge, huge burden being put on the municipality, and then you add on the confusion over what's going to happen with Bill 149. There's nothing fair about that.

What's fair about telling municipalities, "We'll give you the details of the downloading on October 6," and then saying, "Well, maybe we can't do it by October 6"? It's not fair. The member for Quinte should acknowledge that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The member for Quinte has two minutes to respond.

Mr Rollins: I'd like to acknowledge the member for Kingston and The Islands for the tax cuts that he generated for Kingston while he was in charge of that great city down there; the members for Cochrane South and Muskoka-Georgian Bay; the member for Port Arthur. I think that you people all have different perspectives on this bill, the same as maybe what some of us have is a little bit different. I think the biggest thing that we've got to look at is to be able to bring some continuity into the taxation of the province of Ontario to make everybody realize that we've got to deal with industry in particular; that it doesn't matter what part of this great province they're in, they're going to be dealt with fairly, evenly, so that they can compete not only in Ontario but in Canada and in the global market. If we don't have that continuity to make sure that happens that way, all we get is the bumps and bubbles as far as those companies trying to establish

themselves is concerned, whether it's in the great riding of Quinte or in some other ridings around the province.

I want to say that as long as we can deal with the people who are disabled, the people that are on fixed incomes; if we can deal with groups like the theatre groups, if we can deal with the right-of-way people, to look after them and to bring that kind of continuity into it, we can probably accomplish more by working with those people and making sure that there is and evenness and fairness about this whole taxation system, so that when those people realize there's some fairness in it, if the tax goes up, they're not nearly as upset as when there's no fairness in it and there's no continuity throughout this great province of Ontario.

Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to say these few remarks today.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Caplan: This government is creating a great deal of concern and confusion about the property tax assessment system, particularly when it is three months before this new system is going to be implemented and in place. That's astounding. In their haste to fix Bill 106 with this piece of legislation to ask municipalities, to ask businesses to do any kind of planning for the new tax year, to do any kind of planning at all, they allow only three months for that to take place.

2030

This is a very serious issue. It is the most dramatic property tax change ever seen in Ontario.

I was very interested. The member for Quinte was talking and he acknowledged that this will cause property tax increases. I'm very surprised, given that this government is telling people it's keeping its promises. I recall very specifically that in their Common Sense Revolution document this government, Mike Harris's government, said no action they take will cause property tax increases. Perhaps the member for Quinte and many of the other members will want to stand in their places and explain to the people of Ontario, explain to my constituents in Oriole, why they've broken that very key and fundamental campaign promise.

As I said, this piece of legislation comes into effect January 1, 1998, which is just three months, an incredibly short time line if you're in business, and I have been in business and many of the members opposite and on this side have been in business. That is simply not enough time to do the proper planning, to do the proper projections and to have your finances and everything in order, to meet whatever deadlines need to be met.

We haven't even seen the tax rates — those are being set by the minister — tax rates for graduated rates for commercial properties, for rights of ways, for gross tax receipts and many others. Why? If this is of such key importance to this government, why the delay? The minister sets about 25 different tax rates under this bill, subject to whatever amendments may be proposed, and no information has been forthcoming. It's very clear to me and to the people of Oriole that this bill doesn't achieve any kind of consistency; it just creates even more unfairness.

With the removal of the business occupancy tax, you're going to start pitting small businesses versus large bank towers. Can this government explain what's going to happen to those small businesses in comparison to the large bank towers that are right here in the heart of this city?

The rights of way: The member from Muskoka was telling us how this had all been fixed and it was all going to be changed. Well, can he explain why there will be higher rates for rural areas under the rights of way?

Another point of unfairness is that we graduated rates for commercial properties. This will penalize large mall owners. In fact, many of the mall owners over the past five years have been appealing their tax assessments, quite successfully I might add, to the Assessment Review Board, to the Ontario Municipal Board, which by the way under Bill 149 will be eliminated as a route of appeal. These mall owners know the unfairness and they're going to be gouged even further. What does that mean? More uncertainty for the tax base, for municipalities, for school boards, for all those institutions which are dependent upon the tax base.

I have to ask myself, what are Mike Harris and this government trying to hide? Why will they not release any impact studies? They must know what the results of Bill 149 are going to be on local taxpayers, on local businesses. In St Catharines, the mayor of St Catharines, along with several other mayors, has gone out and funded an independent study to look at what the impact is, because this government will not produce any kind of numbers at all about what the impact of Bill 149 is.

We had the member for Mississauga here earlier telling us what a great town it was. Perhaps he should consult with the mayor of Mississauga, who says the same thing. In fact, every mayor in Ontario, every municipal councillor, is telling us the same message, that without the numbers they don't know what the impact is going to be. They have some ideas. They've projected some things out with the downloading, with the impact of this, but the government refuses to share those numbers. Why? What is there to hide?

As I said, this new system is going to be in place on January 1, 1998. No tax rates have been set. Businesses cannot do their planning; municipalities cannot do their planning. We're just getting mass confusion, needlessly. An open consultative process would certainly go a long way to making this bill much more palatable.

In a third vein, we've had two finance bills, Bill 106 and Bill 149, but we still have no bill from the government on education financing. Why not? That is a key component of the tax system. In fact they're leaving a great deal of it on. Where is the plan? Where is the vision? Where is this all going? The members opposite can't answer that. The Minister of Education, the Deputy Premier, the finance minister can't answer that. Why? Because there is no plan. It's being made up as they go along.

Perhaps the most unpalatable part of this ripoff by Mike Harris of property taxpayers, both residential and commercial, is this whole downloading plan. Just to touch on a number of the areas: welfare, family benefits, drug benefits, long-term care, home care, public health, public housing, child care, highways, ambulance services. All of these are being downloaded on to unsuspecting residents, unsuspecting businesses, resulting in higher property taxes. I know the Premier, at AMO, pinkie-swore that this would not result in any property tax increases. He called this revenue-neutral.

It is really interesting. It's a question of credibility. Whom do the people of Ontario trust? Do we trust David Crombie? Do we trust Joyce Trimmer? Both of these people, by the way, have been asked by the Conservative Party to do some studies for them. Do we trust the Metro Toronto board of trade, good friends of this government? How about the Toronto Real Estate Board? How about every mayor and every council in Ontario?

You have the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Premier, the Minister of Finance all telling us that this is neutral, this is good for us, it's not going to make any difference, and you have everybody else in the province telling us that's not the case, that this is going to place an additional burden on residents and on businesses, and that it's bad for business, it's bad for our communities and it's not well-thought-out and really is a terrible mistake.

The downloading plan is adding about $660 million to the property tax base and it could mean potentially a 4% or 5% increase in property taxes. Of course, it may not. You can cut your services. We can cut transportation, road maintenance, all of the ones that are being downloaded: drug benefits, long-term care, home care, public health, public housing, child care. These are things which obviously the government doesn't value because it doesn't want to pay for them. They want the residents to pay for them and you have to make a Hobson's choice. You can either cut it or you can raise taxes. Those are your choices.

I remember at the outset of all this the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said this would result in a 10% decrease in property taxes, yet won't commit to reducing the portion of the property tax bill they are setting. In fact the minister was shown such disregard at the recent Association of Municipalities of Ontario meeting held back in August that he was laughed out of the room. This, for a minister of the crown who has extensive experience in the public sector, who should know better. It really does show the lack of confidence our public leaders have in this government and in the actions it's taking.

It's very interesting. One of my colleagues said, and I've been saying this to the people in Oriole, don't listen to what this government is saying, look at their actions, look at what they're doing. We've heard things like: "We want quality education. We're going to protect the classroom." Yet their Minister of Education cuts $533 million from Ontario's classrooms and has admitted that it has affected kids and their education. We've heard from this government on countless occasions that they're going to protect tenants, yet they introduced Bill 96, which is a direct assault on tenants. We have seen this whole area of property tax, where the government said that no action they take will result in increased property taxes, yet the member for Quinte admitted that property taxes will go up as a result of this legislation and the other actions of this government.

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So look very clearly at the record: They say on the one hand and do on the other, and the two are not the same. The people of this province and the people of Oriole — I know from talking to them over the last two months — are not fooled.

It's clear that the government is spinning out of control: The downloading, the property tax changes, the amalgamation, the education changes are all happening at the same time. It's just a jumbled up puzzle. It seems that the various ministers and the Premier and the leaders in this government keep taking pieces out and throwing them away, and now we're supposed to fill in a puzzle which is totally incomplete. That is not the way that government is supposed to work. It is supposed to be rational. We are supposed to be here to provide service for the people of Ontario. We are not here to create undue hardship and increase hardships on people who live in our communities.

I am very concerned about the effect this legislation and in fact all the actions of this government are going to have upon our communities and upon our businesses. We have had deafening silence from the government benches. They cannot produce any numbers, they refuse to show us any kind of studies and in response to queries and questions from municipal leaders, they keep pushing back the deadlines.

We've had a Minister of Education who promised a toolbox over a year and a half ago; it was empty. Then the gentleman said we'll have a fair funding model for all students in the province — nothing, still nothing, and September 1998 is very close. Boards need to start planning, municipalities need to start planning and people need to know where they stand, but right now this government is flip-flopping around, cannot decide whether they're going to have extra days in the school year, whether they're going to cut the 13th year out of Ontario's education this year or the next year. They just cannot decide what it is they stand for, where it is they're going, and the people of Ontario know this.

Why doesn't this government just stand up and say: "We need help. We've made some mistakes"? Fine. We're very generous. We want to help. We want to all make sure that Ontario is and continues to be a community that thrives and is prosperous for all our citizens. Work with us. The government members should look to all our communities as resources, but unfortunately don't. They take the attitude: "We know best. All of you are just special interests. You have no idea of how these things work, and we'll take care of you." That's a very offensive attitude on the part of this government.

In Bill 194, the minister is giving himself dramatic taxing power by regulation. Backbenchers in this government should be appalled. I thought this neo-conservative

movement was all for decentralization, minimizing and reducing the amount of government in people's lives. Why is this government centralizing power in the hands of a minister by regulation? Why have they done that in Bill 26 with health care? Why have they done that in Bill 103 with municipal affairs and housing? Why have they done that in Bill 104? It's a consistent pattern: the need to grab power, to make decisions and sidetrack the legitimate, democratic institution we have, the Legislative Assembly, and somehow slip in the back door these types of methods and these types of directions, which are not accountable, not democratic. The government backbenchers particularly should be ashamed of themselves.

There has not been enough time for the people of Ontario to absorb and understand all the changes this new system is going to bring into effect. I'll just highlight one. The Ontario Municipal Board used to be the final arbiter in any matters relating to assessment and taxation. That route has been effectively cut off; it is now the Assessment Review Board. That appeal process was very important, because it was an independent appeal. Everyone could go that route. With that kind of change, there are certainly strategic implications to anybody looking to appeal their assessments, be they municipalities or be they residents or businesses.

In fact, the recommendations in Bill 149 go against the recommendations of their handpicked panel on social housing. Why does the government not listen to its own experts? We've seen this in other areas as well. The Minister of Education says, "We're going to have an expert panel give us some input and some thoughts on educational matters." One of those was to reduce preparation time by 25%. What does the minister do? He said, "Great: 50%." The expert panel said that any saving found in education should be reinvested in education. What does the minister do? He waffles and won't commit to anything. He won't commit to kids. This government will not commit to the people of Ontario, and that is tragic.

Everybody in this House and everybody across Ontario wants to see fairness, but Bill 149 increases the unfairness within the property tax system, as I outlined earlier. It takes the concept of fairness and twists it and perverts it.

We really do have a government which is spinning out of control, which is wandering aimlessly, which has lost its sense of direction. It knows it has certain targets to meet in terms of funding a tax cut, in terms of deficit reduction. By the way, the initial promise from this government was to reduce the deficit in their first term. They're not going to make that; it's not even going to be close.

I really wonder, where is the commitment of this government to anything? Why will the government members, particularly the backbenchers, not stand up and say, "We will be accountable"? Why the refusal to be accountable? Why create all these arm's-length panels to give you advice, to get order-in-council power? Why not stand up? Why not say, "The buck stops here. This is our decision and we're going to live by it"? If you've made a mistake, admit your mistakes. That's fine. The people of Ontario are very generous. But that's not the case. The government is confused and moving out of control, and it's their confusion which is causing great concern and even more confusion and angst among the public.

This is terribly disheartening. When I went door to door in Oriole many people said to me: "What's the point of even going out and voting when we have a government that is wandering aimlessly, does not know where it's going, does not know what it's doing and, even worse, refuses to listen?" They refuse to listen to the good sense and to the recommendations of the people of Ontario, the people who have built this province. It's not a government; it's people. I would encourage and invite the members opposite, particularly members of the front bench, to start to include the people of Ontario in helping to restore and rebuild public confidence in this province and in our community of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The Chair recognizes the member for Cochrane South.

Mr Bisson: Chair, it's always a pleasure to see you in that chair. I want to comment on the speech just made by the member for Oriole, two points that came out of it.

Early in his speech he talked about the AMO conference that took place about a month ago. I, as the member for our caucus, was there for the three or four days it was on. I was there when Al Leach, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the minister of ministers when it comes to municipalities in this province, talked about how the whole downloading exercise was going to be revenue-neutral. The member is right. The Tories don't want too many people to remember this, but the minister was laughed at. The leaders of the municipalities of Ontario laughed at the Minister of Municipal Affairs, because he stood in front of all those people who are at the receiving end of his downloading exercise and had the gall to say, "Don't worry, this is going to be revenue-neutral." They all laughed, and they didn't laugh because they thought it was funny. They laughed because they thought: "Is this guy delusional? How can it be revenue-neutral? We're the ones that are going to get all these services you want us to take on and we're the ones that are going to end up with the increased costs." That's the point they make.

The Premier a couple of days later came in to give the big speech of the AMO conference, and he spoke very convincingly, I must say. The Premier can speak a good line when he's out there in front of the people. He made the same comment: "This is revenue-neutral." You know what the leaders of the municipalities of Ontario did? They booed, because they understand that this is not revenue-neutral, not at all. This is about the province offloading its financial obligations and responsibilities on to municipalities. The province ends up decreasing its expenditures, at whose cost? At the cost of the municipalities and their taxpayers. They're the ones who will end up paying in the end.

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Mr Grimmett: I'm pleased to address the comments made by the member for Oriole. Unfortunately, I'm a little disappointed in the member for Oriole. He's been here for

a couple of weeks, and the first few days I said to myself: "Here's a new young member. He sticks to the topic. When he gets up he is well prepared, has read the bill etc." But tonight I'm disappointed. It's obvious that he's been watching some of his colleagues and has started to pick up their bad habits. He got up and, unfortunately, it was rather obvious that he hadn't read Bill 149. He did speak about some other bills — I'm not sure he's read them either — but he did not speak to Bill 149. He did a good job of speaking around Bill 149 and speaking about other issues. I think those are bad habits.

What I would have liked to have heard about from the member were the substantive problems with Bill 149, if he has any. He probably doesn't have any. If he had read Bill 149, I think he would have been quite satisfied with the treatment it gives to assessment, because Bill 149 is all about fairness and trying to provide fairness. It's trying to provide fairness to farmers, small businesses, municipalities and to those businesses that have rights of way in Ontario. Those are all issues that need to be addressed and they're all issues that I'm sure the member for Oriole knows his constituents are concerned about.

Another thing the bill does is that it extends protection for low-income seniors and disabled homeowners. I'm sure that when he was campaigning during the recent election he ran into seniors and disabled people, and they would be quite interested to hear his comments about Bill 149. I would like to hear from the member for Oriole his comments about the sections of Bill 149 that provide relief for seniors and disabled Ontarians.

Mrs McLeod: I would certainly be one to suggest that the member for Oriole spoke very directly to the bill when he was speaking about all the effects of downloading and the effects downloading will have on property tax. That is very much relevant to any bill which stands in the name of property tax reform, when in fact the reform is simply camouflage, something the government has to do out of necessity to try and recover from the sheer mess they are making with the downloading. Any comments related to the downloading are relevant to this so-called property tax reform bill.

I know that the member for Oriole, because he has a background in education, would have wanted to spend more time in his comments on the government's plan for dealing with the educational property assessment. After all, for the first time a provincial government is going to be levying taxes directly on property for educational purposes. I know the member for Oriole wanted to speak to that. He said he would like to speak to it. He said he would like to know what it's going to look like in different communities when the government brings in its uniform mill rate assessment for residential purposes for education. He'd like to be able to address that issue, but he can't, because we can't get any figures from the government. He would like to be able to talk about what's going to happen with commercial assessment for educational purposes. There, you'll remember, the government is going to still require businesses to pay 100% of the tax for educational purposes, but nobody knows how the government is going to levy it. It's not in Bill 149.

I agree with the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay: It's not in the bill. The problem is that it should be in the bill because the government should have a plan. The whole point that was being made by the member for Oriole is that this government is undertaking massive reform of property tax, so-called reform, but they don't have a plan to do it. They're doing it a step at a time: one step forward, in their minds, and two giant steps backward when they discover the mess they've made; another tentative step forward; and the plan evolves on a day-by-day, bill-by-bill basis. When are we going to see the legislation that will actually address the issues the member would have liked to address in his speech tonight?

Mrs Boyd: I want to congratulate the member for Oriole on his speech and say to him that he clearly, as the member for Muskoka doesn't understand, has a very clear grasp of what the problem is with this bill. He very eloquently expressed, in ways that the general population can understand, exactly what the problem is with the bill we have before us. I find it strange that the member from Muskoka would assume that someone who was able to discuss this bill as thoroughly as the member for Oriole did had not read the bill. I certainly didn't get that impression at all.

I think what we are hearing here, if it's any comfort to the member for Oriole, is that the only way government members can protect bad legislation is to attack those who criticize it. That's exactly what we're seeing. We're seeing, in perhaps a more polite form than is usual for this government, the kind of bully tactics we've become used to from them. When we don't agree with them, when the board of trade doesn't agree with them, when AMO doesn't agree with them, when anyone doesn't agree with them, they attack the person who disagrees rather than dealing with the substantive questions that are raised.

The member for Oriole is quite right that if we had the full information in front of us, if we actually knew the impact of this bill and all the other changes within the context of which we have to look at this bill, there might not be so much angst. But this government continually withholds the information, probably because it doesn't have it, probably because it hasn't done its homework. But if it has done its homework, it's withholding this information because it knows that the figures are convincing, that the member is right.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Oriole has two minutes to respond.

Mr Caplan: I note with interest that the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay did not refute anything I said in my presentation, which just indicates that he knows I've made a very cogent argument as to the aims and goals of this government and of this piece of legislation. I would invite him, in fact all the members of the government back bench, to be much more upfront about what their government's agenda is, to be much more upfront with the people of Ontario about what the impacts of these decisions are going to be.

I must admit I don't have all the answers, because I can't get all the information. As the member for Fort William quite rightly points out, I would much rather be talking about this in a comprehensive way. I would much rather be talking about not only property tax reassessment and downloading but also the impact of educational governance and change. What is that going to mean for the people of Oriole, for the people of this entire province?

Property taxes were reserved for municipalities and for municipal institutions to fund their programs. The provincial government has its own revenue streams. It has sales taxes, it has income taxes, it has other levies as well. To now begin to raid the property tax pot is clearly against what it was designed for. I would really hope that the members opposite would stand in their places and say that enough is enough. You've got your hands in too many pies already. This one you're going to get burned on. So stop, reflect, make some changes, because the people of Ontario cannot afford the arrogance and shortsightedness this government has in relation to these matters.

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Mr Martin: It's a privilege as usual to rise in the House and speak to some of the matters before us; on this particular occasion, a bill which is going to change the way we do property tax assessment in this province. We've heard this evening from various members around the room, various pieces of concern, various issues that need to be addressed and put on the table, that all of us need to be concerned about.

As we enter into this rather revolutionary change in the way property tax assessment is imposed in Ontario — and others will speak tonight and tomorrow who will be a bit more eloquent in the finer details of the bill and how it will play out and affect individual taxpayers and perhaps even individual communities. I won't do that this evening as it's not usually my wont. I want to put this bill into some context and to make the links, as we're wont to say sometimes around here.

I want to speak specifically to one piece of the bill which will paint the picture that should be becoming obviously clear to anybody who's listening: that this government has an agenda that will see those who have most in this province, those who are well off, those who are in power gain more of that, become more endowed with the riches we all participate in generating, and who will at the end of the day have more control over the levers that control where those revenues and those profits go that are generated by the hardworking men and women of Ontario.

We know from looking at other jurisdictions, and we know from the events so far in the evolution of the agenda of this government so far, that there is a shifting going on in this province that is hitting the less-able-to-deal-with sector of communities, and this bill is no exception. What we're going to find is a government that is going to be taxed by the fact that they're going to give a tax break that will benefit those who are richest in our communities, and this will present the government with a problem of how to deliver services, of how to pay for services that need to be delivered.

Even though the efforts so far by the government have been to reduce the amount of services that are delivered, they're being very effective at that, and at laying off the people who deliver those services — in the recent Bill 136, even with those people who are left in the business of delivering government services, they are taking away from them the little they get by way of their pay packet, by way of their benefit plan, and at the end of the day we'll find by way of their pension package.

They will still need to have more money to meet their targets to balance this budget, as they predict, by the turn of the century. They will go after the little bit of money that can be squeezed out of the property tax system. What we'll find is that as in every piece of legislation this government has put forward, the big guy wins and the little guy loses.

I want to talk for a very few minutes about one particular part of this bill which is exactly what that is all about. It's the business occupancy tax change that is in this bill and that we are going to see unfold in the not-too-distant future if this government is allowed to continue down the track it has chosen for all of us. This little change in the way we administer the property tax system in Ontario is going to give banks a 40% tax break, and it's going to hand to small businesses and municipal taxpayers a bill of $1.6 billion.

Can you imagine? The banks, which are today making historically record high profits, are going to be handed a 40% tax break in their property taxes — I wish I were a bank — while the small business community, those people out there who actually make the economy run — even the members across the way say small business is going to be the future for Ontario. It's going to be where people are going to work; it's going to be where revenue is generated; it's going to be the engine that drives the economy of Ontario. They're going to be hit with a bill, along with the rest of us who own property or who live in homes — and there are fewer of us each day, as this government goes on, who live in homes or who have a home they can call their own — a $1.6-billion increase in their property tax bill, once this is done.

In the midst of the government's property tax changes, municipal restructuring and offloading of vital social services to municipalities is the elimination of this business occupancy tax.

The business occupancy tax is worth $1.6 billion in municipal revenues across the province. In Metro Toronto the business occupancy tax represents over $600 million of revenues Metro has to fund for services it now provides: the social services it gives out, the garbage pickup, transit, policing and firefighting etc. This represents a significant financial problem for municipalities, given the fact they have just been handed the expense of welfare, some health care services, social housing, transit and all roads by the Mike Harris government.

Recently Metro has released figures which illustrate that some $400 million in extra costs was passed on to it by the province; that is, $400 million more in expenses

after they take into account that they no longer have to pay for education costs.

That's the smoke and mirrors in all of this. Every time you raise this issue with the government, every time you challenge them on the fact that it's going to cost municipalities more to deliver the extra services they're now going to be asked to be responsible for, they say, "We're going to remove some of the education tax off of the property tax." However, the figures that are done by those who know, particularly by municipalities, tell us that some $400 million in extra costs will be passed on, above and beyond what —

Interjection: Ch-ching.

Mr Martin: That's a ch-ching for sure. Yes, that'll be ch-ching for every community in this province as they put out to try and pay for what the province traditionally has deemed its responsibility and has agreed to pay for over the years.

But the $400 million figure leaves out $600 million in revenue lost with the elimination of the business occupancy tax. The province has handed Metro region a $1-billion problem, an extra $1 billion that they're going to have to find and they're going to have to find it through the property tax.

That's what this bill is about. It's the smoke and mirrors that's required to make it seem like it wasn't the provincial government which downloaded this on to the municipalities, that it was the municipalities themselves as they made decisions around what they would and wouldn't deliver and how they might pay for that.

This $1 billion still leaves out future capital costs of repair of aging TTC facilities — for those who don't live in the Toronto area that's transportation, the bus and the subway systems and equipment — repair and upkeep of the social housing stock, and increases in the cost of nursing homes as the population ages and more hospitals close.

The Mike Harris government has blithely assumed that the revenue lost through the business occupancy tax can be made up through increases in the property tax base. That's where you and I get hit, that's where the small business person gets hit, but not the banks. This is set up so that the banks and some of the larger property development companies in this province get a reduction in their tax bill because this government feels that if you give the big guy all the room he needs to wheel and deal and make money, somehow, some way, at the end of the day we will all be better off. Well, we have news for you.

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However, the Mike Harris government has also imposed some rules on just how municipalities can do this. These rules do not bode well for the residential property taxpayer or small business in Metro. Here's why. The business occupancy tax was introduced in 1904; it was probably a Tory government back then. It's a tax levied against the operator of a business, not the owner of the property. It is a tax paid by people running businesses, in addition to the property tax.

The rate at which the business occupancy tax is paid is varied by the type of business being taxed. At the time at which the tax was introduced, the variable rates were based on a perceived ability to pay, in that some types of businesses were viewed as generally more profitable than others. Flexibility: For example, retail outlets are taxed at 30% of the assessed value of the property they occupy. Banks are taxed at 75% of the assessed value of the property they occupy.

Eliminating the tax means that municipalities have to choose whether to absorb the revenue loss or try to recoup it from the property tax, or cut services to all of us. If municipalities choose to make up the lost revenue through increases to the property tax, that means the variable rates are also eliminated and taxes are based on the value of the property. If a municipality tries to get the lost revenue from the commercial and industrial class of property taxpayers, that will mean that small retail outlets would see a possible 50% increase in the tax they pay.

I've recently been working very hard with a group of small business operators in this province called franchisees. They're having difficulty making ends meet, with the small margin they're allowed by the franchisor and the debt they find themselves in once they get into business. Can you imagine how they're going to feel when they experience a 50% increase in their property tax, how many of these small businesses are going to go under? We already have in this province a record-high bankruptcy rate in the small business sector.

I raised in the House last week the fact that right now one of the jurisdictions experiencing particularly difficult times and historically high bankruptcy rates is the hospitality industry. Restaurants are going bankrupt at an alarmingly high rate. This is before the changes we have before us now, which will call for them to put out a 50% increase in the property tax they pay, if this goes forward.

Banks, on the other hand, would see a decrease of some 40%. This is the industrial sector today that is experiencing record-high profits. Does this make any sense? We have on one hand a small business community experiencing some tremendous pressure and a very high bankruptcy rate because they're having a difficult time making ends meet. On the other hand, we have an industry sector making historically record-high profits and we're going to give them a tax break in this bill that's going to change the way we assess property tax.

It sounds familiar to me, like déjà vu all over again. It sounds like the tax break. They're giving a tax break that's going to see the poorest and the ordinary, middle-class working person, yes, making a certain gain on that, and they appreciate it — trust me — in the world you're presenting to them today. But on the other hand, you're giving those who are making extraordinarily high incomes in these very difficult times, the banks included, a huge tax break. You're taking services away from the lower and middle class. At the end of the day, even the tax break they get by way of the income tax reduction will end up not being enough to cover that, so they'll be losers. But you can be sure that those at the top end will be net win-

ners. In the bill we have before us today, that's exactly what's going to happen when it comes to the property tax issue.

The Mike Harris government says in response that municipalities have been given the opportunity to create a new class of property tax for small businesses in order to give them a lower property tax rate. But Bill 106, and consequently the bill we have before us here tonight, allow municipalities to establish a lower rate for lower-valued commercial properties, so the ability to help small business is limited by the value of the property they occupy. In other words, it's impossible to achieve the same differential that existed between businesses under the business occupancy tax. Even establishing any differential at all requires the creation of a new class of property.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that this bill says that municipalities may set different tax rates for different classes of property, but only subject to provincial parameters. They make the rules. Even if a municipality comes up with a way of levelling this playing field, they can make sure their rich friends are the net winners. Those provincial parameters prevent municipalities from increasing the burden of property tax paid by business compared to the burden paid by homeowners.

By establishing a new class for small business, municipalities may cause the burden of the business occupancy tax to be picked up by residential ratepayers. Even if you find a way to make it easier for the small business person to deal with this, somebody has to pay, and who is that somebody? It's the small business person when he goes home and pays his residential property tax and it's the rest of us when we go home from work and pay our residential property tax.

What this all means is that this bill actually prevents municipalities from raising property taxes paid by businesses. Municipalities have been put between a rock and a hard place with the property tax assessment changes at the same time as they have an increasing burden in funding provincial social services.

It gets better with every day that goes by here. Every piece of legislation that comes in front of us contributes more and more to this phenomenon, where those who have, those who can afford, those who are doing well, those who have power get more of the same, and those who don't, those who are vulnerable, those who are marginalized, those who are struggling to make ends meet, those who are facing the possibility of bankruptcy continue to get kicked in the shins and have to work hard.

If you look at the places in North America where the Common Sense Revolution was developed and if you read it and understand it in any significant way, you begin to see that there is a pattern and that what has already happened in other jurisdictions where the Common Sense Revolution has been applied is going to ultimately end up being what happens to us here.

I want to read a piece that was shared in this Legislature not so long ago by the member for Nickel Belt, Mr Laughren. He read a piece out of the Associated Press that was talking about the Governor of New Jersey, Christine Todd Whitman. It says:

"Whitman Makes Election Year Promise to Curb Rise in Property Taxes Caused by Her Own Fiscal Irresponsibility.

"New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman has made another election year promise to reduce property taxes in New Jersey, which have soared over the past three years due to Whitman's own irresponsible fiscal policies. Whitman said yesterday that she wants to create a program to ease the property tax burden, but failed to offer specific details of her proposal. Whitman has been widely criticized for the rise in the state's property taxes caused by her 30% income tax cut" — sound familiar, folks? — "which cost the state $4 billion in revenue" — in Ontario it will be around $5 billion a year — "and forced Whitman to cut state aid to municipalities and school districts to cover the loss. During Whitman's time as governor, the typical residential property tax bill in New Jersey increased by 12%, outpacing the 9% national rate of growth. The state's per capita property tax burden was $3,562 in 1995, the highest in the nation." That's from the Associated Press.

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Any of you who don't think that this is the blueprint upon which the Common Sense Revolution is built, if this isn't what we have in store in Ontario, you just have to remember that in March 1994 Mike Harris went to New Jersey to meet Governor Whitman and to seek additional advice. Two months later, the Conservative program was presented to Ontarians at a news conference.

The Acting Speaker: Comments or questions?

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the remarks by the member for Sault Ste Marie, who talked the usual ideological, dogmatic talk of burdens to working people and tax breaks to help the rich. He forgets, I guess — and this goes to a question of credibility and reality in today's Ontario — who gets these breaks that he says help the rich. The tax cuts for the rich that he talks about, 61% of the tax cuts benefit those persons earning between $21,000 and $75,000 per year. According to the member for Sault Ste Marie, those are the rich people in Ontario today, that is, those people earning between $21,000 and $75,000 per year. That's the sort of credibility that we're presented with in the speech by the member for Sault Ste Marie.

The Toronto Star, on February 20, 1997 —

Mr Bisson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: The member across the way was saying that the member over here was not credible. He was saying basically that the member had no credibility.

The Acting Speaker: No he wasn't. That's not a point of order.

Mr Flaherty: I know that the members opposite think well of the Toronto Star. In an editorial on February 20, 1997, looking at the federal Liberal government's budget, the editorial writers of the Toronto Star said:

"Corporate bosses and rich Canadians pay enough taxes, according to documents issued with Tuesday's

budget. In an appendix to the budget called 'Tax Fairness' the government goes to extraordinary lengths to explain why corporations should not face heavier taxation and why Canada does not need a personal wealth tax. Twenty-three percent is the average tax rate for those with incomes of $50,000 to $100,000; 33% for those of incomes above $250,000 in Canada today."

I'm wowed by the wisdom of the writers of editorials of the Toronto Star.

Mrs McLeod: I very much appreciated the very thoughtful comments of the member for Sault Ste Marie on this second part of the so-called property tax reform agenda of this government. I found it very interesting but not surprising that the member for Sault Ste Marie shares the scepticism that was earlier expressed by the member for Kingston and The Islands and the member for Oriole about whether this so-called reform is actually going to result in a freezing of property taxes or in fact the decrease in property taxes which the government keeps talking about.

The member for Sault Ste Marie of course recognizes that it's going to be virtually impossible for the $5-billion cut in income taxes to which this government committed itself to be achieved without a significant dumping on to the property tax base, in order for the government to be able to make the kinds of cuts it needs to make to find the dollars to pay for that income tax cut.

What happened to the days when Mike Harris used to say that there's really only one taxpayer? He seems to have forgotten that, when he starts dividing it between the people that he has promised an income tax cut to and the property taxpayers that he is about to dump his agenda on. I use that term advisedly, even though members opposite prefer us not to be talking about the downloading.

The member for Sault Ste Marie touched on the business occupancy tax, and I'm sure he shares the concerns that I do, coming from a medium-sized northern Ontario community, where our businesses are going to find any increase in taxation truly onerous. If I had time in this two-minute response, I would want to come back and stress the fact that businesses are still going to have to pay 100% of their educational assessment, although it will be taxed directly by the government.

We don't know how much that's going to cause in terms of an increase for businesses in our community or in Sault Ste Marie or indeed in Metropolitan Toronto. But we know that businesses are going to face an increase in their property tax assessment when they have to pay the costs of the government's downloading plus the government's charges to them for education. I don't think businesses can handle that kind of hit, and the business occupancy tax does not relieve them of what they'll face.

Mrs Boyd: As always, my colleague for Sault Ste Marie gets to the real heart of the problem, that we face a government that is determined to change our tax system from a progressive tax system, a system based on the ability of people to pay according to what they earn, to a regressive tax system, which of course is the property tax system where it takes absolutely no account of the ability of the payer to pay. It simply sets out a regime whereby a certain assessment value garners a certain tax.

My friend talked about all the concerns in the light of this determination of this government, and it is quite, quite clear as you take the cumulative effect of all the changes that have happened, that in fact what he has said in terms of the experience of New Jersey can be expected to be replicated in Ontario. Once you determine that you are going to take a huge portion of the costs out of the progressive tax system, you have no alternative but to put those costs in another place. It's quite clear they're going on the property tax, and the property tax pays no attention to whether people are able to pay it.

Businesses will fail. Senior citizens on fixed incomes will not be able to maintain their properties and to stay in their homes, as we all have said is needed, without the prospect of going into a negative assessment situation where they lose the only piece of property that they have to leave to their children. It is indeed stealing from the poor to give to those who are more well-off.

Mr Harry Danford (Hastings-Peterborough): It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the comments that have been made tonight and in particular to the comments made by the member for Sault Ste Marie. Certainly the introduction of the Fair Municipal Finance Act — and indeed Bill 149 was introduced — as we continue on with it, will bring stability to the assessment situation in Ontario.

I've been involved in municipal work for a number of years and I can well remember each year, in the spring of the year, there was always a debate at county council about assessment, how it varied so greatly from one municipality to the other, and therefore had an effect even within our county system, and how it affected every individual. It's certainly time it was addressed. We have finally found a government that is willing to put forth the amendments and the changes needed to bring stability to the assessment process in the province.

I just have a couple of minutes as the time is very short, but I'd like to speak for a second on one particular aspect of it, and that has to do with tax relief for the low-income property owners. That refers to seniors and those who are affected with disabilities. With the changes, and as we go from market value to actual assessment, the portion that's allowed for there is the reassessment, and we have a grace period of up to eight years. I think that's a very important aspect for those people who find themselves in that position.

This government took that position and recognized that there was a need to make those phase-in periods to address those circumstances. In this aspect, all the tax classes will pay their fair share. I think that's necessary as each municipality looks for the needs to support their community through their tax increases and their changes.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Sault Ste Marie has two minutes to respond.

Mr Martin: Thank you to all of those who have responded to me and participated in the debate tonight. Lest anybody not believe that what's happening in New Jersey is coming at us and is going to be damaging to the middle-

class working men and women of this province, let me just share with you what is happening in New Jersey three years after they put their Common Sense Revolution program in place:

"In order to pay for the tax cut Whitman has had to lay off thousands of civil servants, cut many health and social service programs, slash funding to municipalities and school boards, privatize many government agencies and siphon more than $1 billion from the state pension fund.

"To offset reduced state funding, municipalities have had to institute all sorts of user fees, such as for garbage collection, and increase property taxes dramatically.

"As for the 30% tax cut, a study by the non-partisan state legislature's research arm showed that less than 17% of New Jersey taxpayers — its high-income earners — would receive more than half the cash value of the tax savings from the Whitman cuts, so their cuts were reduced somewhat.

"Her whole idea was to put more money into the hands of taxpayers so they would spend it locally and create jobs. Not necessarily so. One commentator points out that wealthy New Jerseyans who have received sizeable tax relief haven't spent the money where it would create jobs. 'They buy AT&T stock with it, then AT&T lays off 7,000 people and the stock goes up and they make even more money.'

"Whitman predicted the tax cut would create 450,000 jobs over four years, but through three quarters of Whitman's mandate only 115,000 mostly low-wage service sector jobs have been created."

The story goes on and on, and that's what we are to expect here in Ontario in the not-too-distant future. As a matter of fact, it is happening right now.

The Acting Speaker: I understand there is further debate. It will have to continue another day.

It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2131.

ERRATUM

In the table of contents of report 235A, "THIRD READINGS" and "TROISIÈME LECTURE" headings in the second and third columns should read "SECOND READINGS" and "DEUXIÈME LECTURE"

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 30 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 30 septembre 1997

The House met at 1331.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): Last night over 7,500 teachers in Ottawa-Carleton met to discuss the Harris government's most recent attack on education, Bill 160.

These teachers, from public and separate school boards, from elementary and secondary schools, French-speaking and English-speaking, joined thousands of other teachers across Ontario in their condemnation of the Harris government's plans to cut $1 billion more from classrooms in this province. They are even prepared to go out on strike because they believe so strongly that the Harris government's plans are bad for education, bad for children, and ultimately bad for taxpayers.

These are teachers, professional people, custodians of our children's future, being compelled to act as a result of the Harris government's compulsion to find $1 billion more in cuts to education. These teachers have already seen the effects of cuts to education made to date by this government: the elimination of junior kindergarten, the increases in class size, the cuts to special education for children with learning disabilities, the cuts to adult education, the cuts to children's safety — the list goes on.

Teachers realize that Bill 160 will gut our education system even further and they're not prepared to accept any further damage to our educational system any more.

The Minister of Education has succeeded in creating yet another crisis in education. He has succeeded in polarizing teachers in our community and threatening the future of our children's education. I call on him to withdraw Bill 160 and to work with educators and parents so we can improve our education system to better serve our children, not gut it with an ill-conceived income tax cut.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): Today and yesterday Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Eva Ligeti, was visiting the Windsor area. I am pleased to see that she is in the area because residents in Windsor-Riverside certainly take their environmental concerns seriously.

You will recall the commissioner's annual report last year that was very critical of this government's actions with respect to the environment. No longer is Ontario a leader in environmental protection.

It's a good thing the commissioner is doing the outreach she is doing in our communities because with cuts to the Ministry of Environment and Energy budget of 36% and of cuts in staff of over 800, including half of the staff in the Windsor regional office, we can be assured this government is not going to take environmental concerns seriously.

As a result of her visit there is a couple in our area who are making an application under the Environmental Bill of Rights. Jean Bertrand said, "Look at the fire in Hamilton — [this] plant is in the middle of our town and we're concerned about a fire." They're making an application because there's a similar plant in the Amherstburg area.

The Environmental Bill of Rights was passed by the NDP government. We appointed Eva Ligeti as the commissioner and I was proud to play a role in that, but it certainly wasn't our intention that she assume the whole job to make up for the destruction of the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

OWEN SOUND SALMON DERBY

Mr Frank Klees (York-Mackenzie): On August 30 I had the distinct pleasure of travelling to Owen Sound to participate in the Sydenham Sportsmen's Annual Salmon Spectacular Fishing Derby. This was the third consecutive year my son and I trekked to Owen Sound in pursuit of the mighty Chinook salmon. Despite the fact we have yet to make the leader board, thanks to our crafty charter boat captain, Gerry Karn, we never come home empty-handed.

The Owen Sound salmon spectacular is without a doubt one of the finest examples of the wise use of natural resources in our province. The 10-day derby is the brainchild and result of the hard work of the Sydenham Sportmen's Association, a club boasting a membership of over 600 Grey-Bruce anglers and hunters. The association is constantly involved in stream enhancement projects, community wildlife involvement programs and community fisheries programs. They've won numerous conservation awards for their efforts.

Since 1982 the club annually raises and stocks literally hundreds of thousands of Chinook salmon, Rainbow and Skamania. The most popular hallmark of the derby has to

be the Saturday night fish fries, where a team of volunteers organized by my colleague from Grey-Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch, cooks and serves delicious local salmon to over 6,000 hungry guests.

I would encourage all fishing or sight-seeing enthusiasts to mark the last weekend in August on your calendars. I know my colleague from Grey-Owen Sound would be more than happy to arrange your charter boat and put you to work at the fish fry. My thanks and congratulations to the Sydenham Sportsmen —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Statements. Member for York South.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTRUING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I rise today to bring some comfort to the patients of Ontario, that finally there is some indication that the hurt they've been experiencing, the hardship they've seen in the hospitals around the province, is starting to get understood. In fact we've had two reports in the last week which ought to be available to every member of the back bench of the governing Conservative party because they show conclusively that the cuts made by the Harris government are hurting patients.

The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce says $604 million was taken away from hospitals; those are independent figures. The government tried to disguise this, tried to say there was reinvestment, but the bank says differently. Similarly the Ivey school of business reviewed 12 hospitals coping with changes — in fact the 12 hospitals that were most advanced — and they said only two of them were even having a chance of dealing with this.

It must bring great distress to the back bench to know their government has had these figures all along, to know this government went ahead cutting hospitals when they had their own report determine in January of this year that they could only hurt patients. Now we have the Ivey school of business saying the cuts can't continue. Instead of having a reaction by the government that agrees, we have a sloughing off again, unfortunately, of the kinds of very conservative findings which were put forward by this organization.

We know the $1.3-billion cut to hospitals has damaged patients. We know patients now are starting to hear their voices being reflected in what's being heard across the province. What we don't have is any proof or any reason to believe that this government is finally going to listen, unfortunately.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): Last night in this House we were in debate around Bill 149, the property tax assessment bill, the very same bill in which the Conservatives have decided to impose market value assessment on the city of Toronto and others. In that debate yesterday it was quite interesting to listen to the comments of some of the government members, and one member, whom I will not name, because I want to be fair-minded about this —

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Name names.

Mr Bisson: Name names? The member for Quinte yesterday said in his speech that a government knows it's doing a good job if everybody is mad at it. Well, I'll tell you, this government takes the cake. They're certainly doing a wonderful job based on all the complaints and criticisms I've heard from people across society.

Who's mad at this government? Police officers are mad, firefighters are mad, ambulance attendants are mad, doctors are mad, the small business community is mad, the teachers are mad; almost everybody is mad at this provincial government. It makes me wonder what their caucus meetings are like. Can you imagine? The member goes into a caucus meeting and Mike Harris says, "Don't worry, if everybody is mad at us, we're doing a good job." Then the caucus members come to caucus and say: "Mike, there's another group mad at us. We're doing a better job, Mike. We've got another group mad at us."

It was truly a revealing comment made in the speech from the member for Quinte yesterday. I'll let them know there are still a few groups to be mad at them, so you're not doing a perfect job at it yet.

1340

RED HILL CREEK EXPRESSWAY

Mr Trevor Pettit (Hamilton Mountain): I would like to take this opportunity today to inform the House that this coming Sunday, October 5 at 10 am, a long-awaited event will take place in my riding high atop Hamilton Mountain. This Sunday our community will celebrate the official opening of the east-west portion of the Red Hill Creek Expressway. This section of the expressway will be referred to as the Lincoln M. Alexander Parkway or the Linc, named after one of Hamilton's finest citizens and a former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

The importance of the Red Hill Creek Expressway project to the economic growth and development of the region cannot be underestimated. This project will provide a vital transportation link for Hamilton businesses and citizens. In my riding of Hamilton Mountain, small and medium-sized businesses have been waiting for this quick access route to the 403 for over a decade. Many of them located their businesses on the mountain in the 1980s on the assumption that they would have a good transportation route for their goods.

In June 1995 the Progressive Conservative Party of Mike Harris promised the region of Hamilton-Wentworth that it would help fund the completion of this important project, a project that the previous NDP government had stalled. I am pleased to say that this government has lived up to its promise and the Red Hill Creek Expressway will be completed.

I invite everyone to come out this coming Sunday and join myself and all our regional and provincial representatives as we celebrate the first half of this key infrastructure project, a project that will help bring jobs and

economic growth to our community of Hamilton-Wentworth.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): With the Harris government in full retreat on almost all fronts this month, it is time for the Conservative government of Ontario to reverse itself on the slashing of hospital operating budgets by restoring the funds it has already chopped from the hospital field.

The hospital restructuring committee established by the Niagara District Health Council brought forward its drastic recommendations based upon the fact that deep cuts have already been made in local hospital funding and further cuts amounting to over $40 million would be required in the next few years. As a result, the committee recommended the closing or substantial change in operation of five Niagara region hospitals: Hotel Dieu, West Lincoln Memorial, Port Colborne, Douglas Memorial and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The withdrawal of adequate hospital funding in the operations field by the Harris regime has brought about the inevitable confrontation between supporters of hospitals in St Catharines, and this slashing of the hospital budget allocation has forced hospitals to reduce service to a point where the provincial government hopes that local people will accede to a closing of one of our hospitals.

The fact is that we need all of our hospitals in St Catharines, the General, the Hotel Dieu and the Shaver, and we need them funded adequately to provide excellent service to our residents.

I intend to hold Mike Harris to his election commitment which he made during the leaders' debate in May 1995 when he said, "Certainly I can guarantee you, Robert, it is not my plan to close hospitals."

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): I have to tell you that I have profound concerns about what is happening in the educational system and concerns about mon ami M. Snobelen, the new Frankenstein of our educational system, who has done more to destabilize the educational system than anyone before him. Perhaps it is under the guise of privatizing some of our schools. Who knows? But he has done a hell of a lot to demoralize teachers, he has done a hell of a lot to panic trustees and to simply send them away from public service and he has done a hell of a lot to confuse parents about what is going on in the educational system.

I know that the member for Huron yesterday and mon ami M. Snobelen talked about how they don't want to burden our children with debts down the line, and the member for Huron talked about not wanting to mortgage our children's future. What about their income tax cut that does more to take money out of the system than anything else? What about the evisceration of funding for our public and Catholic school systems and university system? They have eviscerated funding unlike anybody before. How does that square off with their concern about not mortgaging the future of their children? Teachers and people who are concerned about teaching should fight back against this agenda, and that will happen.

TELEPHONE SERVICES

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): Recently one of Toronto's daily newspapers reported the results of a leaked Bell Canada internal report. The phone company interviewed 3,414 people, by telephone naturally, to find out what people think of Bell Canada.

They discovered that people are frustrated that it's getting more and more expensive to make a local call. There have been five increases in two years, raising the average monthly rate from $14 to $25, an 80% increase, while inflation has been less than 4%. Small wonder that, according to the survey, people are looking forward to the opening up of the local telephone market to competition next year and that they are planning to cut back on added costs such as call display and call waiting.

With every increase in local rates, every family in my riding of Scarborough East and all across Ontario, from the poorest on up, must make a decision, that they continue to subsidize Bell's huge profits or do without the lifeline of phone service.

Bell Canada's employees are tremendously dedicated at providing the best service they can for their customers, but in 1996 Bell Canada's parent company, BCE Inc, surpassed General Motors to become the most profitable company in Canada, with a total net income of over $1 billion.

Ontarians should be afforded the greatest possible choice at the lowest possible costs. Competition is healthy, indeed it's critical, in a growing economy. I know that residents all across this province are looking forward to competition in the local phone sector and I agree with them wholeheartedly.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I would like to inform the members of the Legislative Assembly that we have in the Speaker's gallery today Major Singh Uboke, member of Parliament for the riding of Tarn Tarn in Punjab, India. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): I have a question of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. By now, no one in this province believes that your downloading exercise will be a revenue-neutral exercise. People just don't believe your assurances that social services, the cost of roads,

highways, GO Transit, ambulances, public health, child care and social housing will not cost municipalities any more money. No one believes you any more. What people do believe is that municipalities will be saddled with an additional $670 million worth of costs. Municipalities fear they'll either have to raise taxes or cut vital services.

Minister, I'm going to ask you today, will you come clean and tell the truth about what the impacts of downloading will be on municipalities? Will you stand up and tell the truth about that today?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): To the member of the opposition, we told the municipalities a year and a half ago, in fact in 1995, that we were going to eliminate the municipal support grant. We took it from $1.4 billion down to $900 million, this year down to $667 million, and then we told them that would be eliminated as well. Most of the municipalities have been able to deal with that reduction without any problem, and most have assured us that they can deal with that again without any additional problems.

One of the opposition's own members, who is now running for regional chair in Ottawa, has stated that he intends to have his whole three-year term without any tax increases as a result of the separation of services. The candidate for the new city of Toronto, Mayor Lastman of North York, states that he will not have any tax increases as a result of the separation of services.

1350

Mr Cordiano: I want to tell the minister that one of his friends and allies, the mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion — remember her? — had a thing or two to say at a press conference this morning. She released the results of an Environics poll that showed that the majority of the people in the regions, in York, Halton, Peel and Durham, believe that as a result of your downloading, property taxes will go up. A majority believe as well that social services should be paid for from income taxes, not property taxes. Interestingly enough, two thirds of the residents of that area have more trust in their mayors than they do in the Premier in receiving information about municipalities.

Minister, it's clear that you and the Premier have a credibility problem. No one believes you any more. Why should they? You haven't released any of the numbers. I want to ask you today: Release the numbers that make the case that this will be a revenue-neutral exercise.

Hon Mr Leach: I don't know where the member opposite has been for the last month. On August 6 last, we gave all the upper tiers the numbers. We also made a commitment to the municipalities that this exercise would be revenue-neutral.

The member opposite talked about the polling that was done by Peel region. I have it right here in my hands. The question is, "Predicted net effect of downloading on the quality of services," and 61% say it would be better or no change, as a result of the separation of services to the municipalities. I don't know if it can get any clearer than that. The member opposite should do a little bit of homework before he sticks his foot in his mouth again.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Final supplementary.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Minister, Hazel McCallion doesn't believe you. She believes you've got the data now and that you're intentionally holding it back until after the municipal election. When are you going to release those figures? We want to know when you're going to release those figures.

Let me just remind you of what you stated at the general government committee two weeks ago. You said, "On October 6, each municipality will be presented with the exact figures they need for the separation of services." We would like to know, are you going to release all the figures on October 6, as you said at the committee two weeks ago?

Hon Mr Leach: I really have to thank the members of the opposition for these questions. I think David Lindsay must write them for them.

We said two weeks ago that we would release the numbers on October 6, and the numbers will be released on October 6. We fully intend to provide every municipality in the province with their numbers. We also intend to meet with every upper tier, with their local members and their separated cities to go over those numbers. We said we would do it on October 6 and we intend to keep that promise. I intend to be in Sudbury on October 6, speaking to the regional chairman and the county wardens, where I will outline the process we're going through.

What did we say we would do? We said we would release the numbers. What are we going to do? We're going to release the numbers on October 6. We have said that this exercise is going to be revenue-neutral, and it will be revenue-neutral.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): My question is for the Minister of Education. You say you have talked to teachers. You say you have understood their concerns. You insist that teachers are not going to go on strike. I don't know what teachers you've been talking to, because you're hearing something that nobody else is.

Last Thursday, hundreds of teachers told you they were prepared to strike in defence of public education. Last night, 6,000 teachers in Ottawa, more than 2,000 teachers in Sudbury and thousands more in St Thomas, St Catharines, Parry Sound, Northumberland and Red Lake all sent you exactly the same message. They believe your government is about to cut funding, lay off thousands of teachers and destroy public education. They know that's what you plan to do when you take total control of education. They are going to do whatever they can to stop you.

Minister, are you still so determined to ram through your agenda, with teachers as the latest target, that you will force this confrontation with Ontario teachers?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I have talked to a number of teachers over the course of the last couple of years. I want to let the member know that the teachers I've talked to are in favour of

having a system of education that promotes the best student performance in Canada, not the middle of the pack as we currently have, and a system that supports them to do that.

They're in favour of a system that's funded in a way that every student in Ontario has an equal opportunity to a high quality education, which is not the current circumstance with the general legislative grant program. They're in favour of having class sizes capped so they don't grow, because the teachers in the classroom have to deal with that phenomena. It may be negotiated at a bargaining table, but they have to deal with it. They're in favour of having class sizes capped, and not grow and grow. They're in favour of spending more time with their students, because the teachers of Ontario are professional people who want to honour their responsibility with their students.

That's the bottom line. That's why they're in favour of this agenda.

Mrs McLeod: Hear teachers. Hear what they're trying to tell you. They do not want to go on strike. They want to teach. They want to work with their students inside and outside the classroom. They want to be well prepared so they can do their job well. That's what teachers want to do and it is what teachers have always done. But you are making it impossible for them to do that any longer with your cuts to budgets and your need to make even more cuts by cutting teachers.

Here's what one teacher, Louis Guertin, who teaches at Osgoode township high school in Metcalfe has tried to tell you about his concern. He says that he'll be walking — not only for the sake of his students but for his own children who are seven and nine — because if your changes go through, he will not want his children in the public education system and he can't afford a private school.

Louis Guertin is determined to do whatever he can to stop you. Will you tell Louis Guertin, not just as a teacher but as a parent, how taking another $1 billion out of education and laying off thousands of teachers will benefit either his students or his children?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I agree with the member for Fort William on one count; I disagree with her on another. On the count I agree with her on, she just said, and I agree with her, that teachers don't want to strike. I agree with that; that's what I've been saying for two months. I'm glad the member for Fort William finally has the message.

Regarding the withdrawal of funds from this system, the member for Fort William has ignored the fact that the gross spending on education has gone up year over year over the last year although enrolment has gone down, and has ignored completely this government's commitment to spend whatever it takes to make sure that every child in this province has a right to a high-quality education, to fund at that level, and is going through the process of asking experts exactly what our young people need so we can provide that funding. For the first time, the province will be able to guarantee that to the students of this province. I think it's a major breakthrough in the quality of education and so will teachers when they see it.

Mrs McLeod: For just one minute this afternoon, will you please focus on what is happening in education now, today? You and Mike Harris, hand in hand, have taken education to the edge of a precipice and you are now getting ready to push both teachers and students over the edge.

Mike Harris has said he's prepared to talk. So far your talking has been nothing but ultimatums: $1 billion more out of education and the laying off of thousands of teachers. You have said you're willing to meet with teachers. You said this morning you're prepared to cooperate for the students' sake. But you haven't called teachers, you haven't written to them, you've made no overture at all since you last laid down your ultimatum.

You can prove today that you are prepared to cooperate for the sake of students by doing three things: retreat from your intention to cut another $1 billion from education; retreat from your plans to cut as many as 10,000 teachers out of education; and withdraw Bill 160 so there can be a reasonable resolution to the conflict with teachers and so there will not be a province-wide strike. Will you do these three things today?

Hon Mr Snobelen: You cannot withdraw from an intention you don't have, and the member for Fort William knows we do not have those intentions. We have said day in and day out and spelled out very clearly what our intention is.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I appreciate all the advice the member for Scarborough East offers. Minister.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Once again, and no longer surprisingly, the member for Fort William has said something today that is just not backed by fact. I wrote to the Ontario Teachers' Federation last week and asked them for a meeting. I wrote to them again last night and asked them for a meeting, because I think it's important we discuss these issues for our students.

Lastly, let me be very clear to the member for Fort William: We are certainly standing hand in hand, my colleagues and I, on a breakthrough on our schools in Ontario so that our students will no longer be middle of the pack, so our students will rise to the top of the class, so our students' performance will be the best in Canada. That's what our objective is and we're moving forward on that step by step by step, building a better education for the young people of this province. I am proud of that.

1400

CHARITABLE GAMING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. It concerns the mess surrounding the government's casino policy and the conflicts of interest which are beginning to be obvious.

I want to quote from the Canadian Gaming News, because it has another report about the connection between Domenic Alfieri, the former president of the Ontario

Casino Corp, with the Trillium group, one of the lucky eight high-powered casino operators picked by your government last week to own and operate your government's charity casinos.

Then there's the article that relates that Paul Burns, a former adviser to one David Tsubouchi, is now with RPC Anchor, another of the successful bidders. As Canadian Gaming News says, some people are questioning the fairness of the process. It is very difficult for anyone. When are we going to see your conflict-of-interest legislation, Minister?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I think the question with respect to the conflict-of-interest legislation or rules would be better served going to the House leader, who is involved with that actual process, but let me speak to the issues the leader of the third party raised.

This actually came up, probably several months ago, in a similar question, and I wish I had the Hansard for my reply to him. Mr Burns left my office —

Interjections.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: I'll answer the question again, because we had to answer this before in the House. Mr Burns left my office prior to the release of the RFP. He had discussed his departure with the Integrity Commissioner, who advised him that at that point in time he had no concerns that Mr Burns would be violating any rules, as long as he left prior to the release of the RFP. So we have had this discussion before.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: If I might comment with respect to the process, we clearly indicated that the process is to be an independent, arm's-length, transparent process —

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Minister, let me put this together for you. Your government, to get its way on its gambling initiative, is willing to put a significant number of small businesses off the block, threaten charities with loss of their revenues, bribe communities with a promise of money, and now your government officials are jumping into bed with big American gambling interests. Just how much of a pimp are you willing to be on behalf of these interests?

The Speaker: I didn't hear the very end of that question, so I will offer the answer to the minister, unless you stand and — if I had heard you correctly, I would have asked you to withdraw, but I'm not certain I did.

Mr Martin: I can put it differently, Speaker, if you like. How much is your government willing to prostitute itself for, for big American gambling interests in this province?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Since the honourable member had two cracks at asking the question, perhaps I have a little bit of leeway in terms of answering the question. With respect to the way the member asked the question in the first place, I can only say that's the case and the bed was warmed by you guys first.

The selection process that was followed by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario was very similar to the process followed by the previous government in terms of awarding the contract to the permanent commercial casino in Windsor. The process was clearly one that was independent. We wanted to make sure it was independent of political involvement and therefore the decision was made and evaluated by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario. The committee consisted of representatives from the Gaming Control Commission, the Attorney General's council, the OPP, and the outside experts from Deloitte and Touche and Coopers and Lybrand.

This clearly had absolutely no input from either our ministry or the rest of the government. That's why we wanted to keep it independent. I might add that I understand of the firms selected by the board, seven have a Canadian equity component and six of the eight have at least a 50% Canadian equity.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): Minister, yesterday you were talking about compensation to municipalities as part of your charitable casino initiative. I want to remind you of the experience in Windsor-Riverside that I'd like to share with respect to those municipalities that may be tempted to take up this government's bribe to locate charity casinos in their municipality.

Before the last election, Mike Harris promised our community 10% of the revenues from the Windsor casino, but after the votes were counted, suddenly the selection priority was not a priority any longer. People are asking two years later, "Where is the money?"

My question is this: If you have no intention of fulfilling your promise to the city of Windsor to share 10% of the revenue, why should municipalities in Ontario believe you when you're offering them bribes to take charitable casinos now?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: First of all, the municipalities have indicated to us, certainly over the last several months, that they had a concern in terms of resources needed to be used to monitor the effects of both the charity gaming club and the video lottery terminals, but also to have discussions within their own communities to determine what's best for their own communities. This is simply compensating back to municipalities. We've put it in writing to them. Everyone has had it in writing from us that this is $1,500 per video lottery machine.

But I might say that not everyone agrees with the honourable member in terms of the effect plus the positive aspect it can bring to your community. I might ask you to turn to your right a little bit and to the member for Cochrane South, who indicated he was pleased with the recent announcement because it will mean jobs in the Timmins area. Certainly this means between 200 and 300 jobs —

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: Those comments were never made by myself, and the minister knows that. I ask him to withdraw.

The Speaker: I have no idea and I don't want to get involved in that. You may correct your own record. The minister's record is his to correct.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Mr Speaker, I'm sure the member gets the advantage of having the press clippings as well. They indicated over the weekend on CJQQ radio that the reports were that this was the case. If it wasn't, I certainly agree that it's a good-news scenario for Timmins, because it will mean 200 to 300 jobs in the area.

1410

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Education and Training. A week ago the Premier said very publicly, in an effort to head off a potential clash with teachers across the province, that he would be willing to meet with the leadership of the various teachers' federations to discuss some of the issues of concern. Can you tell us, please, what the Premier has done over the last week and if he has met with any of the leadership of the various teachers' federations to discuss the issues of concern.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I can tell the leader of the third party what I have done as Minister of Education to promote some discussions with the teachers' federations. I think they would be useful and fruitful. I understand the Premier thinks the same way.

I wrote to the president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation and asked a week ago for a meeting, for the fourth time, to discuss the proposal we've had to have an early retirement package available for teachers so we can keep young teachers in the teaching profession. I wrote again yesterday to the president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation and asked for a meeting so that we can discuss the issues surrounding the bill that we recently put in the House and other issues that may be of concern to the teachers' federation.

We have taken those steps and we have a track record of having fruitful conversations with teachers' federations and being able to alter the legislation that's before the House now because of those negotiations and consultations. I look forward to having more in the future. I think it's useful.

Mr Hampton: The answer is incredible. The fact of the matter is that the Premier has done absolutely nothing. Despite his public statements, he has done absolutely nothing to meet with the leadership of the various teachers' federations.

The minister refers to what he has done. I want to refer to what the minister has done as well. The first thing he did when he became Minister of Education was to say to ministry staff that the government needs to create a crisis in education. The second thing he did, after the government promised not to take any money out of classroom education, was to take $800 million out of the classroom on an annualized basis.

But it doesn't end there; it goes on. You are the minister who publicly across this province started to refer to our educational system as a broken system and you are the Minister of Education who on a regular basis started to talk about Ontario's students as mediocre. Your response is simply to write a letter now.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Question, please.

Mr Hampton: I want to ask you again: You are the person who has promoted this crisis. What is the Premier doing? Who has he met with in order to head off —

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I won't go through a line-by-line response to all the things in the leader of the third party's preamble. They're obviously not accurate, and I think that's obvious to the leader of the third party.

I will say this. We had meetings coming out of the Bill 100 review with teachers. They expressed their concerns. We had meetings with them before we tabled the legislation. They expressed their concerns. They expressed their concerns about the right to strike, and we met that concern. They expressed their concern about the Bill 100 review that suggested that they lose their monopoly in representing teachers. We said that teachers expressed no problem with that, and so we respected what they told us. They told us they wanted to make sure that principals remain part of their community, remained in the bargaining unit, because they felt that would be the best environment in a school for learning and for the students, and we respected that submission.

We have a track record, unlike your government when it was in power, of talking with people, discussing things with them and bringing legislation forward that meets their concerns. We will continue to develop that track record in the interests of our students.

Mr Hampton: Minister, you say you have a track record. You do indeed have a track record, and let me continue reading from it. You are the Minister of Education who hired your personal lawyer to do a review of teachers' collective bargaining. A bit of a conflict of interest? You are the person who began over a year ago mumbling from one end of the province about how you wanted to take a further $1 billion out of the education system, and then you are the Minister of Education who in your legislation has attacked the very thing that teachers care about most. Teachers do want to be able to engage in discussion and negotiation about class size, because their working conditions affect children's learning conditions. You are the person who has introduced in the legislation an attempt to take away teachers' preparation time.

The Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Hampton: From the beginning until now, you have done everything you possibly can to force a confrontation with teachers. I want to know what the Premier has done about his promise —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let's be very clear about track records. Your party is the party that left our students with fuzzy standards on a three-year basis so that no one understood, grade by grade, what was expected of them. We are the government, sir, that has brought in grade-by-grade standards. We are the people who have brought in a

province-wide report card. We are the people who are fixing —

Interjections.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let's be clear. You left our students with an unclear curriculum. You left our students stuck in mediocrity in terms of their performance on pan-Canadian and international tests. The leader of the third party —

Interjections.

Hon Mr Snobelen: You left our students with a $41,000 debt each. That's what you left our students with: a poor-quality education and a high debt. That's what you did to diminish their futures. We are working hard to repair the damage you have done, to repair the problems you created for our students. We'll continue to work hard to do that, because we believe the future of this province and the future of those young people depend on our hard work to improve the quality of education they get right across the province. I and my colleagues are committed to that goal and will continue to be committed to it.

1420

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Minister of Education and it is around Bill 160. One of the most amazing parts of the bill to many of us is that it gives Mike Harris the power to unilaterally, all by himself, set property tax rates to collect over $6 billion of property tax. For the first time in Ontario's history, it can all be done with the stroke of a pen, with no debate, in private, by the Premier, by what's called regulation. Mike Harris, alone, can set $6 billion of property tax. He's the $6-billion tax king with this bill.

My question is this: Why does Mike Harris want this bill to give him the power to unilaterally set $6 billion of property taxes in the province?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I'm sure it won't surprise the honourable member that I take exception to the way he has represented the bill.

But I can tell him this: If he wants to go around and talk to property taxpayers in Ontario, property taxpayers who have seen the education portion of their property tax expand by 120% in the last decade while enrolment went up not nearly that amount, while inflation was not nearly that amount, if he wants to talk to the people who are paying those property taxes that are out of control, he'll find out why the people of Ontario think it's finally time for someone to take control of that, for someone to cap the costs they're paying through their property taxes for education. They've been asking for that for some time. It fell on deaf ears with your government, sir. It has not with this government.

Mr Phillips: Perhaps you don't understand the bill or perhaps you just don't want to answer it. But I want to say on behalf of Ontario that this is unprecedented. It is undemocratic. The Premier, with the stroke of a pen, no debate — nobody from the public can have any input in this. This will be done at the cabinet table by the Premier, setting $6 billion of property tax. It is unheard of, and the people of Ontario want an answer from you. Do you understand, Minister, what you are doing? You are giving Mike Harris the unilateral power, unprecedented, to personally set $6 billion of property tax rate.

My question to you again is that this is undemocratic. Do you not agree that it is wrong? Do you not agree that the people of Ontario deserve an opportunity to have a discussion and a debate and some input before you set their property taxes? Do you not agree that it is wrong to give Mike Harris those unilateral powers? Will you agree today to change the bill so the people of Ontario will have some input before Mike Harris sets their property taxes?

Hon Mr Snobelen: We have done some broad consulting before this bill arrived in this Legislature. I'd suggest the honourable member do some consulting with the people of Ontario, because he will find they are frustrated and angry and fed up with rising property taxes to education. If he talks to the mayors from around Ontario, they'll tell him that they are tired of taking responsibility for collecting that, because they keep getting hit by their constituents that their property taxes are going up because of the school boards.

What we have done is that we have answered the request of AMO, we have acted on the reports that have been submitted to previous governments that fell on deaf ears.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Minister?

Hon Mr Snobelen: During the proceeding of this bill through the House, during the debate on it, I'm glad that the member opposite will be presenting to the people of Ontario the opportunity of continuing to pay escalating property taxes. My colleagues and I will be proud to go them and say their property taxes for education will be cut in half because of this legislation.

ONTARIO HYDRO

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the minister responsible for Ontario Hydro, the Minister of Energy. The minister will know, I hope, that today the select committee on Hydro begins its hearings and that next week we'll be hearing from Mr Carl Andognini, the American whiz kid who's going to turn Hydro around.

The problem is that Mr Andognini, it seems to me, has a credibility problem. I have a copy of his application to the Atomic Energy Control Board that he made last spring — he was applying for a five-year licence — in which he said:

"A longer licence renewal regime would allow the licensee to more effectively manage its nuclear operation while proactively and expeditiously addressing necessary analytical work. As you are aware, licence periods in excess of 10 years for nuclear facilities are granted in other countries."

This is what Mr Andognini said to the AECB last spring. Then, a month or so later, he declares there's a crisis in Hydro's nuclear plants. Do you have any insights or inside information on which Mr Andognini will be appearing before the committee?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): Actually, both Mr Andogninis will be appearing.

Mr Laughren: It's a very good thing the select committee consists of some of the more experienced members in this assembly or we wouldn't be able to deal with that.

Mr Andognini's application to the AECB is full of all sorts of upbeat statements, but as I say, a month later it was a crisis at Ontario Hydro in their nuclear division. In it he says, this is to the AECB, "By defining good operation, monitoring performance and taking action to drive continued improvement, we ensure that the highest station priority, safe operation of the operating units, is being maintained." A month later it's a crisis situation.

What's bothering me is this is the person who is the chief of the nuclear division and you obviously must have some confidence in him or he wouldn't be there. I'm asking you today, do you find it as breathtaking as I do that Mr Andognini is making these statements?

Hon Mr Sterling: I think the member will find that as he goes through the select committee hearings, this problem and the context in which Mr Andognini is making the particular statements he refers to are very different with regard to the reason those statements were made. I guess what is very difficult for the public to understand and for members of the committee to grapple with is that the AECB, Ontario Hydro and Mr Andognini have said the reactors are operating safely at the present time.

The conundrum, of course, is to operate these reactors safely at a much higher efficiency; in other words, instead of being up 55% of the time, being up 80% of the time. That is the real question that is going on here and what Mr Andognini is trying to address.

That is why we have struck the select committee, so the public will have the answer to —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): New question, member for Hamilton Mountain.

HOME CARE

Mr Trevor Pettit (Hamilton Mountain): My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. As you well know, many of my constituents on Hamilton Mountain are seniors, and during this time of health care restructuring they're deeply concerned. Their reliance on home care services makes them particularly vulnerable. My seniors have told me they need to be able to rely on support workers who serve them where they live — the nurses, homemakers, therapy services and other home care workers. Without the assistance of these services, many people who now live independently would be in hospitals or long-term-care facilities.

In Hamilton right now the responsibility for home care services is being transferred over to community care access centres or CCACs. Minister, would you please explain to the seniors of my riding what makes the CCACs a superior method of service delivery versus the status quo, and how will they improve the care being offered to my constituents?

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): I'd like to thank the member for his question and advise him and all members of the House this government is very proud of the 43 new community care access centres it has implemented across this province. This is overcoming previous problems of seniors and the disabled having to phone three or four different phone numbers, and also they'd have multiple assessments being done on them for a whole range of services. This one-window access to home care is more sensitive to their needs, more cost-effective for taxpayers, and therefore we'll be able to provide more services. So far, I'm pleased to report, we've started up 41 community care access centres across this province and seniors are very enthusiastic about the new moneys that are coming in.

I know members on all sides of the House have raised questions about the deficit in Hamilton-Wentworth. I want to assure members that what's changed in Hamilton-Wentworth is that we have community members serving on a board, with higher standards of accountability for service agreements. Business plans are now being signed for the first time in Ontario's history and we're very proud of that.

1430

Mr Pettit: What especially worries my elderly constituents is the transitional period when the system is changing from the current community providers to the new CCAC structure. They worry that some services could fall by the wayside as the system and the administration are realigning themselves. I would ask the minister to assure the seniors of Hamilton Mountain and the province that the restructuring will be competently managed and they will continue to receive the same high quality of care during this period of transition.

Hon Mr Jackson: I can assure members that CCACs will be delivering the highest-quality services available in this province. I'm pleased to report, having visited almost every one of these CCAC centres across the province, that the transition period has gone very smoothly. There has been no disruption of services. We have provided additional equity funding, they have signed their business agreements and we're very pleased the transition phase has worked very well. In fact, on Friday I was in Sudbury meeting with all nine northern CCACs to discuss and resolve any of the difficulties they might be experiencing.

The bottom line is that seniors and the disabled have waited 10 years, through three governments, to have this form of service delivery for seniors and the disabled in this province. We're very proud that we have been able to provide it, that it is increasing accountability at the local governance model level in communities, that we are having a common assessment tool so that seniors, whether they're in Hamilton or in Thunder Bay, are getting equal

treatment, and finally, that we are bringing quality assurances for the first time in home care to the province.

PROSTITUTION

Ms Annamarie Castrilli (Downsview): My question is for the Attorney General. You are part of a government that proudly proclaims it is fighting for law and order and common sense, yet ironically while you are busy imposing a whole range of user fees on the people of Ontario, it seems you are not willing to allow men who purchase sexual favours to contribute a $500 fee towards john school, a program that helps them to deal with the consequences of their behaviour.

The proponents of the fee argue that the $500 fee would be in the nature of recouping administrative costs for the Salvation Army and Metro Toronto, and go towards StreetLight, which is a program to help rehabilitate prostitutes. They argue that it is the johns, not the taxpayers, not the community, who ought to pay for these costs. Your ministry is stonewalling. Would you not agree that common sense dictates that you charge the appropriate people, the johns, and not the communities?

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I appreciate the important question from the member. We have been working with the StreetLight organization to develop the program that now exists by way of the john school. Certainly we have worked with that organization and indicated an administrative fee would be reasonable in terms of funding the actual john school program.

Unfortunately, the cost of the recommended $450 or $500 fee is considerably more than the cost of running the program. I'd like to tell the member that similar programs are running in Hamilton, Ottawa and St Catharines where the administrative fee to be involved in these programs is roughly half that suggested by StreetLight. So we are working with StreetLight to come up with an administrative fee that will cover the cost of the program. That's the way we want to correct this situation.

Ms Castrilli: StreetLight is quite a different program. StreetLight is a program that rehabilitates prostitutes, but john school is what we're talking about. It is the fee for the john school that right now the province is refusing to allow, to pay for Metro Toronto johns. As you pointed out and indeed as Metro councillor Judy Sgro, the chair of the Task Force on Prostitution, has indicated, there are jurisdictions in Ontario which charge for the services that are rendered. Really the question is: Why is it that in other jurisdictions in Ontario they are being allowed to levy a charge, and here in Metro Toronto that does not seem to be the case? Why the discrimination, why the delay, and what are you afraid of?

Hon Mr Harnick: I thought I had answered that question, and the answer is quite simply that we are prepared to allow an administrative charge to fund the john school program. The problem we have is that the administrative charge suggested by those who now operate the program is not only to operate the john school diversion program, set up pursuant to section 213 of the Criminal Code, but it is to do more, it is to fund more than just this program.

The difficulty we have is that this is not the way other programs in Ontario have been set up. What we are inclined to want to do is set up the program to be consistent with those others to pay for the john school, because that is what the diversion program was set up to do. We are trying to develop an administrative fee that will do that and that will be consistent with other administrative fees so that we can run this diversion program properly.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I have a question for the Minister of Community and Social Services. I have here a letter from one of your parental support workers to a woman dependent on family benefits. The woman in question is a victim of spousal abuse. She lived for a time in the women's shelter and counselling services in Huron. Now she is on her own and is attempting to put her life together, but the letter she received from your ministry told her that it is her responsibility to ensure that here ex-partner, her abuser, be present at the benefits meeting.

The letter goes on to say that she is also responsible for ensuring that her abuser complete and forward a financial statement. "Failure to do so will require you to retain legal counsel and make an application for support," says the letter. Minister, are you aware of the kind of danger that puts a victim of spousal abuse in?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): Yes, I am very aware of the danger. If the honourable member would very kindly provide me with the details, I'll look into it immediately.

Ms Churley: You need to understand the position of abuse victims. Minister of Community and Social Services, this letter constitutes nothing more than further abuse. Bill 142 gives unprecedented powers to your family support workers. If anything, you are making the situation worse.

We all understand the need to ensure that non-custodial parents pay their obligation. As you can see, Minister, I'm very upset by this, but your government is not enforcing support orders. It appears as though you have given abuse victims that responsibility. In your haste to make changes, you have forgotten some of the important details; in this case it is the lives of abuse victims. Where is the screening process? Why was this woman put in this frightening situation? Will you make sure that it doesn't happen again?

Hon Mrs Ecker: With all due respect to the honourable member, and I appreciate the need for confidentiality in this, it's going to be a little difficult for me to follow up when I don't have the information of the individual who is in this circumstance. I would very much like to get that information so we are able to ensure that procedures were followed appropriately and that no one was put in danger.

The other thing I would like to say to the honourable member is that one of the things we are attempting to do in Bill 142, our welfare legislation, is to make sure we have

parental support workers whose job it is to help women who have moneys owed to them by other parents who are not paying child support. One of the things we are attempting to do is to assist them. If procedures have not been followed, I will certainly look into this. I repeat to the honourable member that some information would be very helpful to follow through on this.

Ms Churley: It's a form letter, Janet. It's a form letter that your ministry is sending to victims of abuse. Will you admit it?

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The member for Riverdale, come to order. I'm warning the member for Riverdale to come to order. Minister.

Hon Mrs Ecker: If a procedure has been adopted that is not appropriate for these circumstances, we will certainly change it. I would like to thank the honourable member for bringing it to my attention.

1440

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): My question is to the Minister of Education and Training. The big issue in the riding this weekend when I was back home was clear. It's about the possibility of an illegal teachers' strike across Ontario. In fact, students were here today from Ridgeway and Crystal Beach High School. Mr Neigh's class and Mrs McCallum's class joined us in the gallery, and the students were very clear that they don't want to see an illegal strike in Ontario. I don't think in my heart of hearts that the classroom teachers want an illegal strike.

But every time I turn on the news or read the papers, unlike the students and unlike the classroom teachers, it seems like the leaders of the unions keep talking about pushing for an illegal strike across the province. I think it's very clear that the students, parents and classroom teachers want the children to stay in school, but the unions are playing a different tune.

My question to the minister: What is he doing to try to avert the possibility of an illegal teachers' strike?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for Niagara South for the question. I share his view that the teachers in Ontario's classrooms have a great respect for their students and a wish to honour their obligations to those students and to their contracts. I agree that they are certainly not eager to do anything illegal.

I wrote to the president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation a week ago and asked for a series of talks. After publicly saying that I would be open for consultation, we wrote last night and suggested that that would be useful at this time. I'm looking forward to a response in the affirmative from the teachers' federation some time in the very near future.

Mr Hudak: I'm pleased to hear that the minister is open to these discussions. I'm sure the parents and students and the average classroom teacher out there are very pleased to hear that. The question I think they would have me ask is: What will be the issues the minister would discuss in these meetings?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I certainly wouldn't want to constrain the talks by setting parameters, but I can tell you I would be very interested in discussing with the teachers' federation how useful it would be for teachers and for students to have a cap on class sizes. I would be willing to talk with them about how elementary school teachers in Ontario have the same amount of time in class as their counterparts in other provinces, and yet our secondary school teachers have less time with their students than teachers in other provinces. I think it would be useful to have that conversation.

I would like to talk with them about how we could have a retirement package put in place — we put $250 million in the last budget for this purpose — to make sure we have young teachers coming into the system. I think it would be useful for us to have a conversation about that.

At the end of the day, as I have been for the last two and a half years; I'm interested in hearing their input on how we can meet what should be our common goals, I believe: to have the highest student performance in Canada by Ontario students and to do this at the best cost possible. I think that's what we owe our students and I'd be willing to work with the federations to do just that.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): I have some issues to raise with the Minister of Education regarding our post-secondary students in Ontario and the lack of support your government is giving to them. There are some facts that don't add up.

The number of students who need to borrow to finance their education has gone up this year by 53% since the 1991-92 year. Over the course of that time, your government has taken $20 million out of student job plans. You've raised tuition by 30%. You have put Ontario last on the list of funding per capita out of all other provinces. You've put us 10th out of 10. Your government is on the verge of implementing no rent control for students, who tend to move considerably more than others. On top of this, you have no real solution to address the skyrocketing debt that our college and university students are facing.

Your proposal of an income-contingent loan repayment plan has been severely criticized. The model is unworkable. It doesn't meet the needs of students. It will discourage qualified students from applying, knowing that their debts will be $25,000 or more. You've slammed the door on those students.

Why won't you sit down with the primary stakeholders, the students, to work out a better plan to deal with student debt than you have created?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I'm pleased to report to the member for Scarborough North that I have met with student associations over the last couple of years, working on the very difficult issue of how to support students in paying their fair share of their education costs. Most people recognize there is a

fair share, but they also recognise that students will have a difficulty in meeting that fair share of their costs.

To do that we have encouraged our federal counterparts to work on an income-contingent loans package. It makes sense to us to allow students to repay their fair share over the productive course of their career, so that the repayment would be tailored to the amount of money they were earning after graduation. We understand students sometimes don't have high-paying jobs immediately after graduation, so an ICLP would allow us to meet their needs.

We also have taken several other actions that the member for Scarborough North would be aware of to help our students, particularly our students who are most in need. We continue to move forward to an income-contingent loans package that will help us meet all those needs.

Mr Curling: Your lack of financial support is threatening those institutions in a way that ensures Ontario will stay last, as I said to you before, in funding, out of all the provinces. We should be supporting a well-educated workforce, but this government is not committed to that.

Your proposal lacks consideration with regard to grants, an interest-free period from graduation during periods of unemployment, an improvement of the current OSAP situation, like not penalizing students who have to work part-time to meet the costs not met by the current loans formula that you are trying to propose.

Minister, what you have done is slammed the door on further education. I suggest to you that you are listening to only those you think are advising you. Will you consider our proposal that would give encouragement to those students who want to be further educated, and not penalize those who have a smaller income, by having a longer time to pay off those debts? Will you do that?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Obviously this government has continued to work with groups to help our students and help accessibility to excellent-quality programs in the post-secondary sector in Ontario. We think that's important to the future of Ontario.

If I can point out to the member for Scarborough North, recently his federal cousins in the throne speech presented a couple of programs I think will be useful for post-secondary that were based on, or at least followed the example of Ontario, where we last year put in place the Ontario merit scholarships, which will help our best-performing excellent students in the province, and the Ontario student opportunity trust fund, a trust fund for the students most in need in the province, that has exceeded expectations and now sits at some $500 million.

These are programs your federal cousins have looked at and said, "These make sense for the students right across Canada." We'll continue to work hand in hand to get a better environment for our young people.

PETITIONS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE DISABLED

Mr Gilles E. Morin (Carleton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced Bill 142, An Act to revise the law related to Social Assistance by enacting the Ontario Works Act and the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, by repealing the Family Benefits Act, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act and the General Welfare Assistance Act and by amending several other Statutes; and

"Whereas Bill 142 and its regulations will have a direct and substantial impact on the lives of many people with disabilities and their families;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urge the government of Ontario to release the proposed regulations related to Bill 142 immediately, so there can be meaningful public discussion of the changes that will result from this legislation and to ensure that Bill 142 and its regulations are subject to extensive and public hearings across Ontario so that the people who are affected by this legislation and the related regulations are given adequate opportunity to be heard."

I have signed this petition.

1450

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I have approximately 200 names on this petition. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ownership of a domestic animal or pet is a responsibility, not a right; and

"Whereas owners have a responsibility to treat their domestic animals with care and utmost concern for their wellbeing; and

"Whereas cruelty to animals should be punished and sanctioned with fines, penalties and/or bans on animal ownership; and

"Whereas inspectors of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals should not be obstructed from carrying out their duties to investigate abuse or neglect;

"We, the undersigned, support the amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

I affix my signature.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This is a petition regarding Bill 160 to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I know the Minister of Education will want to hear it.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas we cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents, teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and to be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature to this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition to the Minister of Environment and Energy and the Premier of Ontario.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire; and

"Further, we, the undersigned, request that the Ministry of Environment and the government of Ontario take responsibility for the immediate cleanup of the fire site."

On behalf of my constituents, I add my name to theirs.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Dave Boushy (Sarnia): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government has failed to address the root causes of waste, duplication and unnecessary administration in our health care system; and

"Whereas the provincial government has introduced Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, that makes it easier for employers to reduce the number of front-line staff and to lower their salaries and benefits and thus causing further deterioration in quality patient care; and

"Whereas Bill 136 also erodes the democratic process by tampering with collective agreements and potentially interfering with workers' choice of bargaining agents;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, and restructure the health care system in a safe, coordinated and rational way."

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): I have a petition which is much like the last petition you heard from the member for Sarnia and deals with Bill 136. It's to the Honourable Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the following undersigned citizens of Ontario, beg leave to petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Bill 136, the Public Sector Dispute Resolution Act, 1997, will not meet its stated objective to facilitate collective bargaining in the event of mergers and amalgamations; and

"Further, if enacted, Bill 136 will interfere with free collective bargaining, impose a new bureaucratic and dictatorial regime, remove the right to fair and impartial arbitration of disputes and the right to strike; and

"Whereas the Ontario Labour Relations Board has a long and successful history of mediating labour disputes;

"Therefore, in the interest of maintaining and enhancing quality public services provided by dedicated public employees, we hereby petition the Ontario government to withdraw its proposed Bill 136 legislation and support a fair and workable system that will not disrupt the supply of public services to the community or the livelihoods of thousands of Ontarians."

I agree with this petition and I have signed it accordingly.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas workers' health and safety must be protected in the province of Ontario, especially the right to refuse work which is likely to endanger a worker, the right to know about workplace hazards and the right to participate in joint health and safety committees; and

"Whereas the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations help protect workers' health and safety and workers' rights in this area; and

"Whereas the government's discussion paper Review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act threatens workers' health and safety by proposing to deregulate the existing act and regulations to reduce or eliminate workers' health and safety rights and to reduce enforcement of health and safety laws by the Ministry of Labour; and

"Whereas workers must have a full opportunity to be heard about this proposed drastic erosion in their present protections from injuries and occupational diseases;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose any attempt to erode the present provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety

Act and its regulations. Further, we, the undersigned, demand that public hearings on the discussion paper be held in at least 20 communities throughout Ontario."

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I sign my name to theirs.

HUNTING AND FISHING

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): I'm pleased to present a petition sent by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, 121 people from across this province, including two in my riding, supporting the hunting heritage in Ontario. I'm pleased to enter it to be a record of the Legislature of the province of Ontario.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): "To the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas the undersigned residents living in the city of Thunder Bay in northwestern Ontario are in need of a new regional acute care hospital situated in the city of Thunder Bay to provide the said residents with quality health care services in a modern and up-to-date acute care hospital; and

"Whereas the partial renovation and restructuring of the existing Port Arthur General Hospital, a 65-year-old outdated and antiquated hospital building, proposed by the health services review commission and the Minister of Health for the province of Ontario will not be suitable, adequate or proper to provide such quality health care services to the said residents; and

"Whereas the undersigned residents endorse and support the Thunder Bay Regional Hospital and the trustees of the hospital board in their vision of a new centrally located hospital to serve the northwestern Ontario region;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to reverse the decision and direction of the health services review commission and the Minister of Health to have all acute care services for the city of Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario region delivered from the renovated and restructured site of Port Arthur General Hospital and to endorse and approve capital funding to build a new centrally located acute care hospital in the city of Thunder Bay."

Once again, this is signed by several hundred constituents in my riding, and I've affixed my signature in full agreement.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a further petition regarding the need for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton. It's signed by constituents in my riding in the streets of Picton West, Hughson Street North, Bay Street North, Victoria, MacNab and Macauley. It reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, request the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Energy and Environment Canada jointly: (1) to conduct a full-scale public inquiry into the Hamilton Plastimet fire to determine the complete nature and extent of the pollution it has caused, the health effects on firefighters and others attending the fire, as well as residents in Hamilton and farther afield; and (2) to ensure safe, speedy and complete cleanup of the fire site, plus residential and all other areas where chemicals from the fire have fallen out."

I add my name to those of my constituents.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 44 people.

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass a bill empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

1500

TVONTARIO

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): The people of Ontario are very concerned about the threat of privatization of TVOntario and petitions are coming in from all across the province calling for public consultation before any decision is made. The petition reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas TVOntario is owned by the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has opposed public support for maintaining TVO as a publicly owned and funded educational broadcaster by putting TVO through a privatization review; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has not confirmed that full public participation will be part of this privatization review;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold open and honest public consultation with the people of Ontario before making a decision on the future of TVO."

This is sent to me by Susanne Marquardt from Thunder Bay. I am very grateful for that and I am very pleased to sign my name to that petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dave Boushy (Sarnia): I have a further petition.

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario has decided to reduce taxes by 30%; and

"Whereas this government has proceeded to reduce the level of public health care service through the hospital restructuring committee; and

"Whereas complementary legislation such as Bill 7, Bill 26 and Bill 136 are turning the negotiation process into a one-sided sham; and

"Whereas the morale of these front-line health care employees has hit rock bottom;

"We, the undersigned organized staff in the Sarnia-Lambton health care sector and members of the carpenters' Local 1256 and users of health care, do petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To withdraw Bill 136 and to re-establish the funding and level of service in the health care sector."

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Parkdale): I have a petition signed by a number of people from the west end of Toronto and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health has started to charge seniors and social assistance recipients a $2 user fee for each prescription filled since July 15, 1996; and

"Whereas seniors on a fixed income do not significantly benefit from the income tax savings created by this user fee copayment or from other non-health user fees; and

"Whereas the perceived savings to health care from the $2 user fee will not compensate for the suffering and misery caused by this user fee or the painstaking task involved to fill out the application forms; and

"Whereas the current Minister of Health promised as an opposition MPP that his party would not endorse legislation that will punish patients to the detriment of health care in Ontario;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned residents, strongly urge the government to repeal this user fee plan, because the tax-saving user fee concept is not fair, sensitive or accessible to low-income or fixed-income seniors; and lest we forget, our province's seniors have paid their dues by collectively contributing to the social, economic, moral and political fabric of Canada."

Consequently, I am proud to affix my signature to this document.

ABORTION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 253 people.

"Whereas the Ontario health system is overburdened and unnecessary spending must be cut; and

"Whereas pregnancy is not a disease, injury or illness, and abortions are not therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the vast majority of abortions are done for reasons of convenience or finance; and

"Whereas the province has the exclusive authority to determine what services will be insured; and

"Whereas the Canada Health Act does not require funding for elective procedures; and

"Whereas there is mounting evidence that abortion is in fact hazardous to women's health; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers funded over 45,000 abortions in 1993 at an estimated cost of $25 million;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cease from providing any taxpayers' dollars for the performance of abortions."

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR MUNICIPAL FINANCE ACT, 1997 (No. 2)

LOI DE 1997 SUR LE FINANCEMENT ÉQUITABLE DES MUNICIPALITÉS (N^{O} 2)

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 149, An Act to continue the reforms begun by the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997 and to make other amendments respecting the financing of local governments / Projet de loi 149, Loi continuant les réformes amorcées par la Loi de 1997 sur le financement équitable des municipalités et apportant d'autres modifications relativement au financement des administrations locales.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I rise at a very turbulent time in the life of this particular government, the Harris regime. Over the past two weeks we have seen major retreats on issues. In fact, the other day when the Premier stood in the House with a lot of bravado and bluster and denounced what he called the union bosses, and then the Minister of Labour got up and capitulated to all of the demands which had been made, legitimately, by representatives of working people in this province, I wondered whether I was looking at reality. But what I could hear in the background was the bugle of retreat sounding, the white flag flying on the other side of the House.

A lot of people would condemn the government for that. I don't condemn the government for capitulating on this very significant bill. They brought in a bill which had a lot of very tough provisions. The Premier went around the province telling everybody how he was going to put labour in its place. Various members of the government went around the province and they were telling their friends in the big business community and the contributors to their campaign how at long last here was a government that was going to put those public service workers in their place.

What the government found out was that the people who work in the public service have neighbours and friends and relatives and family, and people recognize the significant role they play in our province, and the government began to see itself diving in the polls. Every one of the public opinion polls saw the government diving in support. So despite the hard-line, right-wing Conserva-

tives who support the Reform Party federally and who are very concerned about this issue, the Premier totally capitulated, and I want to compliment the Premier. I don't often compliment the Premier in this House, but I want to compliment the Premier on his total capitulation to what he calls the union bosses. I don't call them that. I, of course, call them the elected representatives of working people in this province, but the Premier calls them union bosses.

He reminded me the other day of — the members for Oakville South and Wellington won't remember this because they're too young, but the Minister of Agriculture might remember — Phineas T. Bluster. Mr Bluster, they called him in the TV show called Howdy Doody. I hear it's coming back now. Phineas T. Bluster would be all bluster. There really wasn't much substance there, there really wasn't much backbone there, but Phineas T. Bluster would get up and bluster all the time. That's what I thought I saw a week ago Thursday. I was flabbergasted, because I saw the Premier get up in as tough a stance as I've seen —

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: This is not Howdy Doody time; it's debate on Bill 149. I have yet to hear, in four minutes of debate, any reference to the bill. I was wondering if you could bring the speaker on topic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Thank you for your help. I would remind the member for St Catharines — the rules are very clear on that — he should speak to the bill.

Mr Bradley: I always like to put this in context of the total government program, and it's always nice to have the YPCs, the Young Progressive Conservatives, the most right wing of the right wing, those who are aspiring to be in the cabinet, rise to point out the fact that perhaps a speaker on the opposition side isn't as much on topic as he might be. The problem is it's usually, as the member for Fort York will agree, when an opposition member is making a salient point, is really revealing to the public of Ontario what's going on.

I'm just wondering, having seen the government do a full retreat on Bill 136, whether it intends to do the same on Bill 149, the so-called Fair Municipal Finance Act. I'm not convinced yet, but I see some evidence, and I hear the beeping of the truck moving backwards, because you want to signal when you're backing up. I hear some evidence that in this municipal field, the government may be backing down as well.

The relentless questioning by members of the opposition has taken its toll on the government ministers and on the Premier. I know that. All of our colleagues at the municipal level of government, some of them good Conservatives, have been attacking this government for attempting to download responsibilities which legitimately are those of the provincial government on to the local level of government. The government is obviously feeling that heat and I suspect we're going to see some capitulation. Indeed, with these special kitties they've put aside, these special funds, no doubt they will be coming forth as benevolent uncles, giving money to Brockville, Ontario, where they're closing down the psychiatric hospital.

1510

I well recall the statement of a good friend of mine in this House, Bob Runciman, who is the member for Leeds-Grenville and the Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services. I read in the paper what his mother had to say about the closing of that hospital. I can't think of anybody who was more accurate in her assessment of what this government was doing. I'm glad to see that she wouldn't be intimidated by the fact that her son — I'm sure she's very proud of him, and should be — is in the cabinet. In fact there are some in the government benches who suggested that her son wrote the statement. I can't believe that. I will not believe that.

Hon Noble Villeneuve (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs): It's not true.

Mr Bradley: Noble Villeneuve says it's not true — I'll take his word for it — that the member for Leeds-Grenville actually said that about the closing of the psychiatric hospital.

I vary from the topic. I'm mindful of the member for Nepean, who wants to keep me on topic now that he has reduced my speaking time to 20 minutes on any particular bill. Through his prompting of the government, through his effort to ingratiate himself with the Premier, he has had the rules of this House changed so that the government can whistle through its legislation in record time.

What you have to watch with this as well is that it must be taken in the context of all the downloading. I was talking to someone in St Catharines the other day who has a child on a travelling team or an all-star hockey team. That person said that just to get on the ice now it is some $800. The Speaker, the member for Etobicoke West, mentioned a figure in the amount of $1,100 simply to be able to get on the ice. That's for all-star hockey. What this means is that if you're the child of a rich person in the province, you're going to be able to play all-star hockey, but if you are the child of a person with a modest income, the people this government has forgotten, then it's just too bad.

I don't believe we're going to be able to provide a Cadillac for everybody. I don't believe you can provide a $5-million mansion for everybody to live in. I don't think people can all wear — what is it they wear? — $2,500 suits or something like that. This suit here is far less than that, I can assure you. I don't think you can do that, but I do believe we should have equal opportunity for youngsters in our community to make it.

I am fearful that when this bill passes, not just by itself but in the context of the major downloading taking place, we will see a further division in our province, with the rich, the powerful and the privileged receiving the great benefits and the rest simply having to make do with the minimum of benefits that might be available to people in this province.

That's most unfortunate, because while I think Ontarians want to see everybody who can do so working hard to be able to move ahead, to be able to provide for them-

selves — I think all people agree with that — they are concerned when they see that people who are unable to do so are shunted to the sidelines.

I mentioned in a statement yesterday that I attended on Saturday, along with the member for Welland-Thorold, at Club Social on East Main Street in Welland, a forum sponsored by People First Welland. It had people from all over the province. These are people with disabilities and these are people who are extremely apprehensive about some of the legislative and regulatory changes they're seeing in the province.

This government would miscalculate if it were to do damage to these people in any way, because while I say there may not be sympathy out there for those who are unprepared to look after themselves and are capable of doing so, there is a good deal of empathy and support for people who are disabled in some way or other and are trying to cope with that disability or are trying to overcome that disability. "Every time we put a new user fee on people, that is a tax." Who said that? Well, I didn't say it. Mike Harris, the now Premier of Ontario, when he was leader of the third party, the Progressive Conservative Party, said to the people of this province, "A user fee is a tax."

On that basis this government has probably been responsible for several thousand tax increases in this province since it came to office, since these user fees have been increased both by this government and by municipalities that have had no other choice except to raise user fees. If you are wealthy, if you are privileged, if you are powerful and if you don't have a social conscience, if you are in all those categories and you don't have a social conscience, then that means you should be happy with this government.

I am always amazed at the number of government members, the family coalition caucus, I call them, the family values caucus, who walk out of church on Sunday morning with their pious faces and say, "I am a moral and good and ethical person," but when it comes to implementing that which has been taught in church in a variety of fields, they sometimes forget the rest of it, that it is not simply living the pious life that is important, the moral life that is important, but it is also important —

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): Madam Speaker, on point of order: If you were paying close attention to what the member for St Catharines was just saying, I think he's impugning motive.

The Acting Speaker: I have to admit I didn't hear what he said. I was distracted here for a moment. If the member has anything to apologize for, I would ask him to do so. If not, there's nothing I can do. I didn't hear him.

Mr Bradley: I was not at all impugning motives. I thought that anyone this applied to might get up to object, but others out there, I'm sure, would not worry about it. Anyone who didn't get up to object would say that it wouldn't apply to them. I'm sure of that.

I'm really perturbed by this because I simply ask how it is that people can come out — we all know the teachings of the churches. We have had the letter from Bishop Asbil of the Anglican Church, the Bishop of Niagara, who wrote an open letter to the Premier expressing his objection to the way the Premier was dealing with social issues in the province. I read that letter into the record. I happen to know Bishop Asbil and I have a good deal of respect for him. People from the other churches have put out letters expressing concern about what the government is doing, what its agenda is all about.

The point I'm making is that you can't simply wear the label of churchman or churchwoman and then come out and not live that life, not remember that which is taught in church. I think that's important. There is a service, an empathy for others that is learned through the teachings in various churches in this province. I think it's important that those who wear the family values label are able to also remember those who are less fortunate than themselves, because it's really very important for all of us to remember that we do so.

When I see the downloading that is part of this total platform — and the member who intervenes, I remember when he intervened when they were going to close his hospital — St Mary's hospital was it? I think it was. He said he was very thankful to that hospital for saving his life. I know there are many people around this province who have hospitals they feel equally strongly about, that they believe should not be closed. That's why I know he will join me in holding the Premier of this province to the promise that he made during the 1995 election campaign, when he said, "Certainly, Robert," referring to Robert Fisher of Global TV, "I can guarantee you it is not my plan to close hospitals."

I join my friends from the Kitchener-Waterloo area in fighting to keep that hospital open. I commend the member for speaking out on that and I join him in wanting to keep his hospital open.

1520

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: My good friend from Lambton intervenes and mentions the words "video lottery terminal."

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton): No, no, no.

Mr Bradley: I heard an interjection from someone who mentioned it. Let me say, this bill mentions charities occupying industrial or commercial lands. I don't know if that refers to charity casinos or not, but I do know that in the realm of assessment and taxation — the Speaker wants me to be on topic —the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, faced with over 50 municipalities that said, "We don't want the electronic slot machines in our area," said: "If you take them, I've got a deal for you. I've got $1,500 per machine for you, so you might get over $200,000 and your charities will benefit." The Minister of Municipal Affairs said, "Woe betide those municipalities that don't accept these charity casinos," because they're not going to get the so-called benefits of them. I see that in this bill. I see a reference made in this bill to it.

I know that our municipality, St Catharines, has said: "We'll have none of the hush money, we'll have none of the conscience money, we'll have none of the blood money that comes with the installation of video lottery terminals,

electronic slot machines, that prey upon the most vulnerable people, the most desperate people in our society, the most addicted people to gambling. We'll have none of that. Even though we're experiencing a downloading of responsibility and millions of dollars of additional costs for municipalities to assume, we don't want those machines. We don't want machines that will prey upon the most vulnerable people in our society."

Conrad Black won't be playing video lottery terminals if he comes into one of the ridings where there's video lottery terminals. Trevor Eyton isn't going to play them. Conrad Black isn't going to play them. Bill Gates, when he comes to Canada, won't be playing them. But people who are desperate, people who are not well connected to the rich and the powerful and the privileged, who don't have the same opportunity as others, in desperation often turn to gambling when the opportunity presents itself.

By extending that opportunity, by escalating and expanding the gambling avenues in this province, this government is encouraging that. It is doing so to make up for the loss of revenue that exists in the budget because you are giving an income tax cut of 30% which will benefit the most wealthy in our society to the largest extent.

I hear government members say: "The revenues are still coming in. Boy, you should see the revenues coming in." I'll tell you where they're coming from. They're coming from gambling. The price we pay socially, the price we pay in the tearing of our social fabric through this constant escalation of gambling opportunities, is a price which I believe is too high to justify the money which will come into the coffers of the province.

I find this bill to be part of the general agenda of this government, which is why I felt it was necessary to expand beyond the specific confines and provisions of this bill, to put it in the context of the total government program which is being presented to this Legislature in record time.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Responding to the member for St Catharines, I appreciate his understanding of the need to put this, and quite frankly any other piece of legislation that has gone through this Parliament since Bill 26, in the broader context. These are all pieces of a puzzle and this government had better start to understand that the image contained in that puzzle is starting to become more and more apparent to more and more people across this whole province.

Just this last Saturday, Jim Bradley, the member for St Catharines, and I were down at the Club Social in Welland where People First, an organization, a movement, I tell you, of persons with disabilities had organized a conference. There were people there from all over Ontario gathering down in Welland at the Club Social. They were people who spoke on behalf of themselves, on behalf of their families, on behalf of their communities about their concern and their intimate familiarity with the serious impact this government's downloading is going to have on people's lives in Welland and Thorold and Pelham and St Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Port Colborne et al across this province; how this government's abandonment of community is going to hurt communities, is going to hurt families and is going to hurt individuals, and as often as not the most vulnerable of individuals, people who historically and systemically have been marginalized, who have been struggling with great courage and tenacity to find their rightful place in the mainstream, who now find themselves being shoved off to the side once again.

Property taxpayers in Welland and Thorold, across Niagara, understand that this government's downloading is going to result in property tax increases of literally hundreds of dollars. This government's abandonment of social housing, of non-profit housing, of co-op housing, which has been so successful in Niagara region and so important for so many families and so many mothers and their kids and working people and, yes, the unemployed and seniors, is going to be thrown to the wolves, is going to be thrown to the private sector.

This government's abandonment of community and family is a tragedy that will take decades and generations to overcome, but my people in Welland and Thorold are ready for that —

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The member's time has expired. Further questions and comments?

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I'm pleased to rise and bring the debate to Bill 149. The members for St Catharines and Welland-Thorold will know about the very important thing in this bill, the item in terms of international bridges and tunnels. In fact, when we came to Port Colborne to talk about these measures in the finance bill, we realized how important it was to allow for the expansion, in fact the twinning, of the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie, a $200-million expansion plan on track.

If the government hadn't acted courageously — I think a theme of this government is to make decisions that have been left on the back burner for decades. Previous governments — the Liberal government under Peterson, the NDP-Howard Hampton-Bob Rae government, and even the PC governments before that, to be fair — didn't act until you had a hodgepodge of taxation systems. Each bridge and tunnel was taxed differently from the next.

The Peace Bridge faced a great deal of tax uncertainty; they didn't know what their taxes were going to be from one year to the next. Certainly, if you're going to be raising a $200-million capital plan, you can see the jeopardy in which that would put that project. By acting decisively in clearing up that entanglement, we've seen that the bridge will now be paying its fair share, its full share, of municipal property taxes and it's going ahead with that project.

The member for St Catharines is well aware that one John Lopinski, well known in Liberal circles, in fact a former candidate in Niagara South, has been praising the government for its decisive action on this issue. It's allowing for the bridge to expand, and when the bridge expands that means more trade, more tourism and more jobs for Niagara. By acting, it's a good thing coming to

Niagara. When you hear John Lopinski, of all people, talking about the importance of this bill and that it's a good bill — I know his son, Bob Lopinski, works in the Liberal back offices and makes a lot of the calls. I think Bob will convince the member for St Catharines and the rest in the House to listen to the wisdom of his father and support this bill.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): The value of the comments of the member for St Catharines is that he was able to take the few strands that are in Bill 149 and show how they relate to the entire agenda and the tax policy of this government.

The member for St Catharines, though, has quite rightly indicated that it's a little bit difficult for us to debate a Conservative Mike Harris government bill on taxation because they keep changing their definition of taxes. How do we talk about the entire agenda of the Harris government on taxes? The member for St Catharines remembers that Mike Harris used to say a user fee is a tax, yet we see no concerted policy to control the increased taxes through increased user fees — just the opposite. We see constantly escalating user fees.

1530

I remember when Mike Harris used to say there's only one taxpayer in Ontario. Quite clearly he's forgotten that because his sole focus for any of his so-called reforms is to deliver a tax cut on the income tax side, and in order to do that he is prepared to dump millions of dollars on to the property tax base. Beyond that, Mike Harris is proposing to tax property directly for educational purposes, something we've never seen before.

I think the member for St Catharines quite rightly asks, "Who benefits from the income tax cut?" It is the people who have the largest incomes, the most well-to-do. They're the ones who are going to get the most money in their pockets. But how about that other taxpayer, the property taxpayer, the one Mike Harris is going to dump on? Who is going to be hurt most by the dumping on property taxpayers? It's going to be the seniors whom the government is going to offer some short-term protection to and have them incur debt, which is going to be extremely troublesome to seniors. It's going to be that middle-income family struggling to buy and to hold on to a home of their own. They're the ones who are going to pay the price for the property tax dump along with those who are paying the price of the tax grab through gambling that the member for St Catharines has acknowledged.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I listened to the presentation made by the member for St Catharines. He's perfectly right on a number of points, but particularly when it comes to the one-taxpayer argument. This government, the Conservative Party of Ontario, in the last election and prior to that made the argument, I would say convincingly, that there was only one taxpayer, and that we had to respect that taxpayer at all costs. With this bill, along with its companion bill that we passed previous to this — I think it was Bill 106 — this government is allowing municipalities, because of what they're doing in downloading — not "allowing." It's not even the right word. This government by way of Bill 149, by way of Bill 106, by way of Bill 126, the omnibus bill, by way of all of the downloading, by way of the cuts to transfer payments to municipalities, is offloading a whole bunch of costs on to municipalities. Who's going to pay for that in the end? It's going to be the municipal taxpayer.

We've listened, as the member for St Catharines has, a number of times when the ministers of the crown and the Premier stand up and try to make people believe in this assembly, as they're trying to make the people of Ontario believe, that people's municipal property taxes will go down. I listened intently with surprise when the Minister of Education today stated in this House that as a result of his government's actions, property taxpayers would see their bill go down by 50%. What planet is this Minister of Education living on?

We know what's going on. The residents of municipalities across Ontario know what's going on. Mayors and councils know what's going on. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario knows what's going on. You guys are in the biggest downloading exercise this province and this country have ever seen and it means in the end that municipal ratepayers will both lose services and see their taxes go up. When the government argues that there's only one taxpayer, what a twist of fate that was in that particular promise.

Mr Bradley: I thank all the members for their contribution. The member for Welland-Thorold recounted the Saturday afternoon we spent listening to people with disabilities and the many challenges they have to face and how they see user fees and other changes in government policy as potentially being detrimental to their wellbeing.

When the member for Niagara South rose, I thought for sure he was going to mention the Port Colborne hospital and the Fort Erie hospital, Douglas Memorial, both under threat of closing because this government has cut so much in the way of hospital operating funding. I truly expected him to get up to speak about that because I know in his heart of hearts he probably shares my concern about that. But you know what happens: When you preach the Mike Harris revolution, part of the Mike Harris revolution is closing those hospitals and saving money so he can give a tax cut to the most wealthy people in our province.

I also want to thank the member for Fort William, who understood my speech very well and the context in which it was delivered. She recognizes, as I do, that the problem with dumping these responsibilities financially on to the property tax is that both the property tax and user fees do not take into account a person's ability to pay. So lower-income people, whether they like it or not, are stuck paying these huge fee increases or property tax increases. Or if a person who has been doing all right happens to have a couple of bad years because of bad health or something or is unemployed, that person is going to have to pay those huge increases in property taxes.

I am amused when I hear the Minister of Education say that municipal property taxes are going to drop by 50%, because I remember it was the Premier who said that as a

result of all this reshuffling we would see a 10% decrease in taxes. Now it's up to 50%.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): It's always a pleasure to have a couple of minutes to speak on any bill this government introduces. I recall that this government is introducing almost a bill a day. This is a party, this revolutionary party, that never sleeps. It is a party that never ceases to continue working, and I tell you it's a problem for us, because if you don't have the time to reflect on what you're doing, you're likely to cause a hell of a lot of chaos in Ontario. They're doing that daily.

Mr Douglas B. Ford (Etobicoke-Humber): Look who's talking.

Mr Marchese: Look who's talking? I'm talking about you. I'm talking about you and your government and the haste with which you proceed to pass these bills daily in this place. This bill, like all your other bills, claims to be a Fair Municipal Finance Act. This bill too, like Bill 106, claims to be fair. This fair bill is going to whack everybody again in Ontario like Bill 106, which gave a big whack and they'll feel that whack as they reassess property taxes. A system they call actual value assessment, commonly known as market value assessment, is going to whack a whole lot of people in the province.

This comes from a minister, mon ami M. Leach, who before the election in 1995 said, "No way are we ever going to introduce a system that's market value." So they introduced a neat thing. They called it "actual value assessment" so M. Leach and M. Harris can claim: "We're not introducing market value. That's not what we've got. Look at the bill. It says 'actual value assessment.'"

That's not it at all. We know that is a hoax. We know it and other people have told them as much. You've got to give them some credit. These people are unwavering and they speak with a straight face. I know the Minister of Labour does it all the time. She speaks with a straight face. She's always so concerned about workers and she's working on prevention. The poor woman never tires of talking about how she worries for all the people she is hurting on a daily basis.

Remember Bill 106, and we've got to bring it in context. It is always a critical thing to do, because this government likes to isolate bills. There's a fine thread that is attached to each and every one of them. Bill 106 calls for the reassessment of all Ontario properties by April 1998, the largest single reassessment ever imagined in North America. Some of the people in the ministry said, "We are very worried." It was the assistant deputy minister who said, "The ministry is aware that the division cannot deliver the reassessments in the time frame set by the government and still carry out day-to-day assessment operations with its current permanent staffing level." This poor deputy realized that they don't have the resources to deal with the reassessment of four million properties. But this government in its haste, because it's a revolutionary party without a pause, doesn't care about consequences of its policies. It just, with its fast train, goes along those tracks and never wavers. The poor deputy says: "We can't do it. We've got a job to do in our own system, and to take other people who are doing this reassessment of so many other things we're doing — we can't do this job." But the government doesn't seem to care about that.

What has the ministry done to protect itself? It has hired close to 500 temporary staff on short-term contracts to keep up with the additional load. Many of the workers have little experience in the assessment field. That's part of the danger, that as we hire a whole lot of people to do this work, we are not sure of the quality of work we're getting. This contracting out, in my view and in the view of many, puts the reassessment quality at risk as untrained individuals are hired to do that job. Contractors who are hired receive only one day of training from the ministry, after which they may hire and train inspectors to do the work.

1540

Look at the kind of qualifications that are asked of these people. "Residential data collector: We require a highly organized, self-motivated individual to complete resident inspections in the Halton-Peel region. The successful candidate must have excellent communication skills, neat appearance and a reliable car. General knowledge of residential home construction required. Contract position. Send résumé immediately." That's the extent of the knowledge that is required of these poor people.

The ministry has decided to spare no expense in its haste to do as many reassessments as possible in a short time frame. We're risking a lot of quality work as we hire people who don't know how to do the job of reassessing properties.

In addition to that, what have we done? Ostensibly to free up staff for the work of reassessment, the government then contracted out the municipal enumeration. On January 31 of this year the contract for the job was awarded to a consortium of three companies led by Amex Canada — American Express. There have been to my knowledge no public discussions of what it means to hand over enumeration records to one of the world's leading credit card companies. But this Conservative government has no problem with things of that nature. They don't mind hiring companies of this sort. They don't think through the consequences of the actions they take.

We looked at the business occupancy tax, and we need to speak about this because everything is in the context of what they are offloading and dumping on to municipalities. Recall that the business occupancy tax takes $1.6 billion out of the system. It will wipe out that amount of money in municipal revenues in one fell swoop and leaves the responsibility of that shortfall on the municipality. I'm not sure if some of the people on the other side understand what that means. It means the municipality is left with a big burden. In Metro Toronto alone, it means $600 million of that $1.6 billion has to be recovered in some way. That's a problem.

If you recall, and we spoke about this in the past, yes, this might be outdated, given that it was something that was introduced in 1904, but it's difficult to explain why they would get rid of a system that was progressive in

nature and replace it with something that we have no clue about how it's going to be repaid.

What do I mean by a system progressive in nature? The business occupancy tax assured us that those who were making money, like banks, were paying a higher rate of tax than someone who owned, let us say, an abattoir or a barbershop. That's a progressive tax system, as outdated as it was. But these people take that away and then say to the municipality, "We are leaving this responsibility to you to fix."

The province looks good with the banks, good corporate friends of these guys over there, these Tory guys, but leaves an incredible burden on the municipality to find a way to replace that money. There are only two sources: the residential property tax base or the small retail, the little business people that these people here claim to represent. One of the members there laughs smugly.

Mr Ford: Propaganda.

Mr Marchese: Propaganda? Member from — where are you from? Let me find you. Douglas Ford, Etobicoke-Humber. The propaganda doesn't come from me —

Mr Ford: From your results — $55 billion, answer that question, over and above the budget.

Mr Marchese: I don't know. I'm talking about the business occupancy tax and he's mumbling about something. I don't know what it is.

I'm saying to you, you've got to answer to that, because you are the fine people who said that people are overtaxed and that you had to relieve these taxpayers of the burden of other governments. Well, you fine Tory members are taking out the business occupancy tax and leaving a big burden to municipalities which then have to pass on that cost to somebody else.

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): Oh, say it like it is, Rosario.

Mr Marchese: M. Palladini, mon chère ami, that's a fact. M. Palladini, mon ami, what are you saying? M. Villeneuve, talk to him. Am I wrong in my assessment of this?

Hon Mr Palladini: Ask the businessmen in your community.

Mr Marchese: I asked the businessmen in my community, to Mr Palladini, my friend, the Minister of Transportation. Business people in Toronto are worried that they're going to be whacked with your fair tax bill. Either they are wrong or somehow you haven't communicated to them how they are wrong. Perhaps in your communication package you haven't had an opportunity to be clear with them. Clear it with them; you don't have to clear it with me. It is business people all over Toronto whom I am connected to who are worried about picking up the cost of the business occupancy tax. You might think I'm inventing this. That's all right for you to believe that, but you have to square this off with your small business friends. We're worried about the impact it will have because it will force many of the small business people to leave.

Look at the download bill, Bill 152. What an enormous burden to place on municipalities and what a burden to leave to the taxpayer. These guys talk about the taxpayer all the time. This municipal download is going to hurt a whole lot of people, because look what they're picking up in the disentanglement process. I don't think they understand the word, because in the download bill they have confused it all and there is no disentanglement.

That's perhaps why they don't use the word, because I don't believe they understand it. They haven't disentangled a thing. In fact they have downloaded a whole lot of things to the municipalities. They've downloaded libraries completely. They've downloaded social housing completely to the municipal taxpayer, community police financing, the integration of the farm tax rebate, the homes for special care, community ferries, municipal services, fire services and sewer and water inspections, social assistance program partnerships, child care services. All these things are downloaded to the municipal taxpayer, homeowners who are taxpayers, friends of these guys. They've got to pick up a big load to pay for the burden that these fine people are passing down to them, all the while claiming that the taxpayer somehow is going to save money.

There is no savings in this. There is no logic. There is nothing but lunacy in these policies, because to pass down these costs to the municipal taxpayer isn't lunacy; it's beyond lunacy. These are responsibilities of provincial governments that raise money through a progressive tax system, as progressive as it can be in a capitalist system where those who've got a whole lot of money know how to hide the money, which means that the middle classes, your taxpayer friends, who can't escape paying taxes are stuck with the burden. The working class and the working poor are stuck with the heavy burden of social housing, social assistance, child care, libraries, ambulances and on and on. The list is endless.

1550

Then they come up with a bill, this fair bill, that's going to whack a whole lot of people, whack municipalities. Let me give you an example from this bill in terms of how they're doing it. It speaks of rebates to charities and similar organizations:

"A regulation-making power is added to the Municipal Act to permit local municipalities to give rebates to eligible charities and similar organizations to give them tax relief."

Why would this government do that? It sounds like a good idea. They're doing that because the provincial government has eviscerated funding for all charitable organizations. It is diminishing daily, and because they recognize that the government is being assaulted for taking the social structures away plank by plank, they have come up with a solution that says to municipalities, "You can give rebates to some of the charities." Why? Because the provincial government is no longer helping them out. The provincial government is dumping on municipalities, which will dump on the municipal taxpayer, the residential taxpayer. As a result of removing their support for charities and similar organizations, they are saying to municipal governments, "You can give rebates."

The rebates, Speaker, through you to these fine people, have to come from somewhere, don't they? Where do rebates come from? It isn't something you give as tax relief to somebody for free or for nothing. Someone has got to pay. Isn't that right, Mr Villeneuve?

Hon Mr Villeneuve: It's the $50 million you've left behind that we've got to pay.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Fort York, speak to the Chair.

Mr Marchese: Through you, Speaker, to Mr Villeneuve, municipalities have to find the money somewhere, don't they? If you give a tax rebate, are not the property taxpayer and the tenants who pay taxes the ones who end up having to foot the bill for a tax rebate to an organization or an eligible charity? Of course they pay, and they've got to pay through what system? Property taxes.

Remember, these are the same people who are going to set the mill rates for education. These are the people who are going to centralize what those property tax people are going to pay, including tenants, by the way, who pay a whole lot of taxes, but very few people realize that.

Interjection: Far too much.

Mr Marchese: Far too much, yes. Yet they are downloading all these responsibilities, the load of financing for all the things I mentioned, from child care to housing to ambulances to social assistance to community health to libraries. They're downloading all of this, including saying to municipalities, "You can give a tax rebate," and they will limit what they can raise through property taxes for education purposes and other purposes. There is a limit to what the property taxpayer is going to bear. There is a limit when you download so many services —

Hon Mr Villeneuve: When did you realize that?

Mr Marchese: Mr Villeneuve, please, I'm telling you that you haven't disentangled anything. You're passing down to the municipalities incredible costs.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: Tell us about your disentanglement. Tell us about that.

Mr Marchese: I'm talking about you because you're a well-paid minister. I'm talking about you because you've got the big, fat wheels. You're in charge. I'm talking about you because you folks were going to be different. I'm talking about you because you said you were going to give your taxpayers a break. I accuse all of you of not giving that tax break to your friends the taxpayers, who no longer, by the way, are holding on to that friendship that you thought was there.

You people know that, and that's why you backtracked on Bill 136, pretending you're listening. You're backtracking because you're afraid that you're losing your friend the taxpayer. You're losing the friend who's a taxpayer because that taxpayer is realizing that you people are hurting them too. It was all right when you were hurting the poor, the marginalized, the homeless, women and children. It was all right to do some of that other stuff. Welfare may not have touched some of these taxpayers, but people are beginning to realize that your hospital cuts and your education cuts and your cuts to social services are hurting them and they're fighting back. They're not going to take the hurt that you people are laying on them, and this bill is not fair at all to anyone.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): I'm pleased to provide some comments on the speech given by the member for Fort York. He's always entertaining and today he's at his entertaining best, maybe a little long on entertainment and a little short on content. I'm sure, though, that he has read Bill 149 at length and that is the reason why, after reading it, he has little to say about the bill, because it's a very strong bill and, combined with Bill 106, it's going to provide a new system of assessment province-wide.

Bill 149 contains a lot of additional measures to what were in Bill 106 to provide relief to sectors in our society that need relief when it comes to assessment. He would know that Bill 149 provides measures to assist small business. He would know that it provides assistance to farmers and to the owners of rights-of-way properties and especially to the very competitive theatre industry in Toronto. I'm sure that in his riding of Fort York the theatre owners are very happy to see Bill 149 and the benefits it brings.

He touched on the issue of chaos. I'm sure he was referring to the chaos that has existed in assessment law in Ontario for 20 or 30 years now. It has been the failure by previous governments to address that that has brought us to recognize in Bill 106 and in the current bill, Bill 149, that there is a need for reform.

I am pleased that he brought up the issue of the province-wide assessments that have been carried out by the ministry. Yes, the ministry has hired some private sector experts, some people who are expert at assessing properties. There is a one-day training program so that those people can get used to the forms the ministry uses. They don't need the training to assess properties because they're already experts in that field. I'm glad the member brought that up and I'm sure he recognizes the expertise involved.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I am certainly pleased to comment on the comments of the member for Fort York. The first thing that I find is extremely problematic is the title of the bill, which talks about the Fair Municipal Finance Act. The first thing I would like to say is that the word "fair" should be declared unparliamentary. "Fair" means, in the parlance of this place, hold on to your wallet. If you see "fair" in the title it means it's coming after your wallet. "Fair" in that context, as the member for Fort York appropriately pointed out, is probably the most misused word in this place.

I want to talk a little about my own constituency and about what this doesn't do. In the downloading there are huge services being required now to be paid for by the municipalities. I want to give you one instance. Now municipalities are going to have to pay for ambulance services. One might have thought that the Ministry of Health was where health should have been looked after, but not in the Harris regime.

I asked the Minister of Natural Resources the other day at estimates: "There are huge expanses of crown land within many of the municipalities I represent. Are you going to pay taxes?" "No." The government of Ontario doesn't pay taxes, so I don't know who pays to service crown land. They're not paying taxes. That's the kind of thing that makes people in my constituency wonder about the fairness of any of this.

This act will require the municipal taxpayer to pay for many services that at present they don't, at least through the property tax.

1600

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I want to commend my colleague from Fort York, who, in his usual colourful way, has described exactly what this bill is about, and of course, Bill 149 is really the son of Bill 106. You have to take the two of those together, along with the offloading, downloading, dumping that this government is doing now to municipalities, because it's all part of a package. If we talk first about the collection work and the reassessment work going on right now, the member made it very clear the type of qualifications that were being asked for, and I'm really surprised that the Conservative back bench would think one day of programming was going to be enough to do this important work.

Let me repeat what the qualifications were when this was posted in Hamilton: "We require a highly organized, self-motivated individual to complete residence inspections in the Halton-Peel region. The successful candidate must have excellent communication skills, a neat appearance and a reliable car. General knowledge of residential home construction is required."

That was the sum total of the qualifications needed under this private sector contract for the people who are supposed to carry out this reassessment. What we have here is drive-by assessment services. That's what we've got going on here. Do you think the public will have any confidence whatsoever in the final figures that this private sector company provides to the government about reassessed values? Goodness. Give your heads a shake. What kind of qualification is that? What kind of a qualification is a one-day training session? You're talking about very important work, thousands and thousands of Ontarians who will be affected, and the people who are doing this, I'm sorry, based on this, are not qualified to be doing that kind of work.

Mr Baird: I would say of the member for Fort York, you can disagree or disagree with him, but at least he had read the bill and attempted to put his remarks to it, which was different from the speaker who preceded him. I would at least congratulate him for that. You can agree or disagree with the member for Fort York, but you can certainly respect that his opinions are heartfelt.

I wonder, do I get all this time to speak? The clock hasn't started yet. I guess I do. I'll just go ahead. I'll read a full 20-minute speech.

In Ottawa-Carleton, we changed our property tax assessment some years ago. We changed the property tax assessment because there were some people in some neighbourhoods of our region living in $400,000 or $500,000 homes and paying the same amount of taxes as people living in a $150,000 town house. There was an incredible amount of inequity to that. To ask a young family starting out for the very first time, buying their own home, to pay for someone who owns a $500,000 or $600,000 house in another part of town, what an incredible burden that put on middle-class families. Equally so in parts of my riding, in Cedar Hill Estates, in Orchard Estates, there was a 1988 value ascribed to their properties, and some of these properties had gone down in value by as much as 50% or 60%, and they were still required to pay enormously high property taxes, which were completely beyond the value of their homes.

The honourable member for Sudbury East said this was the son of Bill 106, and it certainly has a strong relationship. It builds on the fairness that Bill 106 brought in. It will help small business, and the member opposite knows that small business is where we create jobs. In my community we haven't been as good at attracting jobs to Ottawa-Carleton, but we're very good at building up small businesses. The Premier was in Ottawa-Carleton just the other day, and I accompanied him to a business that was started in 1987 as a very small business. This summer they announced 4,100 new jobs in that business, Newbridge Networks. That small business which started in 1987 is now a company with revenues of more than $1 billion.

The member opposite didn't talk about the assistance this bill will give to the agricultural industry. The Minister of Agriculture is here listening attentively because this is an important bill for rural Ontario, and the Minister of Agriculture has done a tremendous amount for the economy in rural Ontario. The agrifood industry is a big industry in Ontario. This bill will help that industry, and it's very important to recognize that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The member for Fort York has two minutes to respond.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate the comment the comments from all the members — Georgian Bay, Algoma, Manitoulin, Sudbury East and Nepean — and I also appreciate the fact that the member from Georgian Bay finds my speech to have an entertainment value and discounts the content value. I appreciate that from the government member. He needs to do that. He needs to undervalue what I might have to say but at least values the entertainment part of my presentation; similarly with the member for Nepean, who appreciates that part but also spoke to the notion of content, so there is some disagreement between the two.

But really, on the whole issue of this bill and Bill 106 — do you remember the mythical character Hydra? — it's a multiheaded monster. They emerge and re-emerge, and they have some similarity. They come together. Hydra, multiheaded — think of 106 and 149. They come together to symbolize the evil nature of this government and its policies. Remember, these guys, M. Harris and M. Leach, said no market value assessment. Well, actual value is the

same thing. So what have you got to say about the veracity of those statements, I ask you. I didn't say it; they said it.

The download is going to add to the municipal tax base a whole load that they will not be able to cope with, all the while pretending these people are helping out, that they're all for fairness. These guys like fairness, and that's what Bill 106 is all about they say, the same people who said there will not be any tax increases any more with this government. But that's what Bill 106 does, and I tell you Bill 149 does very little to help their taxpayer friends.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Wettlaufer: I'm very pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 149, the Fair Municipal Finance Act. Contrary to what some of the previous speakers said, it is about fairness. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin should know all about fairness. His government, in the 1980s, spent like drunken sailors and took away —

Mr Michael Brown: You're insulting sailors.

Mr Wettlaufer: No, I'm not insulting sailors. Your government was far worse than sailors. I'm talking about drunken sailors.

I think an example of the fairness question that we're discussing here is how we are going to treat seniors and the disabled. Municipalities now will have the flexibility to phase in property tax increases, to make any changes to suit their local needs. They can defer them or they can phase them in. The municipal portion will be the municipality's responsibility. School boards will reimburse the municipalities for the education portion of the taxes, and the province then will reimburse the school boards. We're talking about low-income seniors and the disabled who need some help, and this is about fairness for those people.

Why should taxpayers in Kitchener pay more than taxpayers in Toronto for equally valued properties, or conversely, why should taxpayers in Toronto pay more than taxpayers in Kitchener for equally valued properties, or why should a taxpayer on one street in one municipality pay more than a taxpayer on another street for equally valued property, or why should a taxpayer with a $200,000 house in the city of Toronto pay the same amount in taxes as a taxpayer with a $1-million house in the city of Toronto? These are the things that are presently going on.

Part of that is due to the fact that assessment in the city of Toronto as an example, but in many other municipalities as well, was done in the 1940s. If it was done in the 1940s, how up to date can it be? Obviously you're going to have some inequities in the taxation system.

We have another problem with the business occupancy tax. Again, it was outdated. Can you imagine a tax system enacted in 1902 being used for taxes today? In 1902, women still washed clothes using washboards, houses had no closets, most houses had no indoor plumbing, Henry Ford had not yet invented the Model T, but the opposition parties think it's okay to use the business occupancy tax. We've had many improvements in the last 95 years, and one of the things that we are attempting to do here is to modernize the tax system. The business occupancy tax was clearly outdated and we have determined that it should be eliminated. Under Bill 149, the Fair Municipal Finance Act, it is. The business occupancy tax never took into account the income or profit of a business. It was an unfair tax that discouraged employment.

1610

I'll come back to that in a minute, but I want to say that there are several business groups which have endorsed many of the measures in Bill 149. The Ottawa-Carleton Board of Trade, the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, the Windsor and District Chamber of Commerce, the Toronto board of trade, have all responded quite favourably to the measures in Bill 149, measures that we know will result in tax fairness, economic growth and jobs.

Additionally, as an aid to small business, which creates most of the jobs in this province —

Applause.

Mr Wettlaufer: That's right. Thank you, to the member for Nepean. He applauds that, and I applaud small business as well.

Municipalities will now have the flexibility to establish lower taxes for lower-valued commercial properties like strip malls and restaurants, again, to encourage jobs.

International crossings is a very interesting subject. International bridge and tunnel structures would be exempted from taxation but would be subjected to a special payment prescribed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Land and buildings of bridge and tunnel operators in the immediate vicinity of the crossing would be liable for municipal taxes but not school taxes. This provides consistency with the municipalities on the American side of the bridge, and the legislation will provide for tax adjustments so that in any year, the total property taxes paid by a bridge owner to a municipality on the Canadian side of the bridge are not less than the school and municipal taxes paid by bridge authorities on the United States side.

The reaction to this has been so positive that the Peace Bridge Authority in Fort Erie has recently announced phase one of a $200-million capital expansion project. That means jobs; not just jobs to construct the bridge, which are many of course, we know that, but jobs in the concrete industry, jobs in the steel industry and jobs in the trucking industry. All of these products have to be trucked from one place to the construction of the bridge. Many jobs. Jobs, jobs, jobs. We were elected on a promise to have the private industry create jobs.

I know the opposition parties don't like to hear that we have created — no, sorry — that through a positive environment that we've created, we have enabled private business to create 210,000 net new jobs so far this year. That's positive news, but the opposition parties don't like to hear that. Now, they should like to hear it.

From time to time, we hear criticism from members of the opposition parties that some of those jobs are minimum wage jobs. You know, the man or woman who is unemployed doesn't really care. They don't really care if they're minimum wage jobs, because by getting back into the work force they have a sense of accomplishment, they have a sense that they belong, they have a sense that they

mean something. That minimum wage job, they know, is a step to gain experience, to move up and to gain a better job.

Land held for development and still being farmed is another area affected by Bill 149. This industry has 267,000 employees in Ontario alone. At one time, prior to the previous government, they had another 83,000 but —

Mr Michael Brown: Those were the days.

Mr Wettlaufer: Yes, those were the days. Those were the heady days.

Not only do they have 267,000 jobs, employees, but for every employee that they have, there's another one and a half employees in other sectors of the economy. This is a very delicate industry. Do you know that from the time a subdivision plan is filed it can take years, sometimes decades, before the development is completed and people have moved in? It can take years or decades before a house is built.

Anyway, we have a subdivision draft plan. It then moves to another stage, to the stage of the subdivision plan being registered. Then it moves to another stage where a house is built, and a second house, and another house, and then we have a stage where that first house is sold. For this period of time — years, decades — the subdivider has spent a lot of money. He has invested a lot of money and he has not received one penny in return until that first house is sold. It was pretty obvious that something needed to be done to ease some of the tax problems.

There was a situation, the Amoco case, in which there was considerable concern as to whether or not the zoning would affect the taxes, or the use would affect the taxes, so it was important that we take all of these things into consideration and we allow the taxes to be put on at certain stages. There are three subclasses, and there will be a difference in taxation in each one of those subclasses.

I had them but I seem to have lost them. No problem.

The important point to remember is that the developer will not have to pay the full amount of the tax when the subdivision plan is filed. Part of it will be paid when it is registered, part of it will be paid when the houses are built and part of it when the houses are sold. I will conclude with that.

1620

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Michael Brown: I'm certain we're all in favour of fairness but, as I said, usually that means reach for your wallet. There will be in this bill a large number of people in Ontario who will pay a lot more in property tax. That's a fact. What is quite amazing is that Mike Harris will impose, in some cases, nearly 50% of the property taxes in Ontario through setting education rates. Business people have to understand, and I think they should understand, that, yes, the business occupancy tax is gone, but the education tax for businesses is still there. That wasn't removed, that wasn't cut in half, that's still there.

Mr Allan K. McLean (Simcoe East): It's 30%.

Mr Michael Brown: No, it's 100% for businesses. It's the same. Mr Harris will decide that somewhere, down here in the cabinet room, and businesses will still pay that. They will also pay for all the downloaded services.

I think there are some bean-counting magicians somewhere trying to figure out how they can keep these tax rates somewhat in line. We know the government has a bunch of funds squirreled away to mitigate the initial problem here, but that's a short-term solution. It will get you through to the next election but the problem will still be there.

What I'm saying is have a look at this entire package of downloading these market value bills and then check out your tax bill. You're not going to be pleased.

Mr Marchese: I realize my good friend from Kitchener has, as a good soldier, a duty to mythologize about the good things you people are doing. You are all hell-bent. You've got a duty to perform. You've got to invent something that makes it appear like you're doing something good for the taxpayer.

Mr Wettlaufer: And you have a duty to oppose.

Mr Marchese: And we have a duty to expose the mythology. You guys have the big bucks. You guys have the millions of dollars at your disposal that come from the taxpayers, so you can spin it in the way that is appropriate to you. I tell you, if you lose the taxpayer, you people are in trouble.

What is the problem with all this? The income tax cut is the real problem here. With the income tax cut, 60% of all those billions of dollars that are going out are going to 10% of your wealthiest, rich citizens of Ontario, by and large your friends. Because a couple of billion dollars is going out and nothing is coming back in, what you poor people have to do is centralize control and decentralize the burden down to the municipalities. Bill 106 and, in part, Bill 149 are designed to do just that.

The poor municipalities have to take on the burden. I tell you, I wouldn't want to be a municipal politician these days with you people in power. They have a hell of a responsibility having to cut services while not being able to increase property taxes. That's the main job they've got. They will be caretakers for these guys, for this government, to deal with the download, the whacking that you people are giving to your taxpayer friends.

Mr McLean: I'd like to comment on the member for Kitchener's statement in the House this afternoon with regard to Bill 149. He raised the subject and touched many issues affecting farm land, small business, vacant lands, theatres. Small theatres are an issue that a lot of people have not talked about, where small theatres with less than 1,000 seats would receive the same property tax exemption afforded to their publicly owned counterparts. I don't hear the opposition mentioning some of the good things within this bill.

The member talked about the relief that seniors are going to get with regard to Bill 149. Bill 149 extends tax relief to the education portion of their property taxes. This government didn't want any education taxes on the property taxes in the first place until AMO came along and made a deal and said, "We still want 50% left on." For many years, I fought as a municipal politician, hoping to

get all of the education tax off the property tax. We gave in to AMO. This is a government of consultation which listens to the people, listens to AMO and listens to the members from across this province with regard to the very issues that are important to the people of this province. For our government to listen and to implement these changes I think is an excellent way to go.

For small business it's 30% of the full commercial rate for commercial properties and 35% of the industrial rate for industrial properties. In the city of Orillia the industrial rate is about 30%, 35% above the residential rate. There has been some discussion and a need to draw industry to a municipality. They have to have a competitive tax rate. We don't have that in certain municipalities. Bill 149 is going to allow this to happen. I say to the member for Kitchener, your words of wisdom should be listened to by the opposition.

Mrs McLeod: I believe the member for Kitchener has said we really need this bill — in fact it's a series of bills; let's recognize that this is just one in a series of bills the government is bringing in to try and deal with the mess that it keeps compounding in the whole area of property taxation — to deal with the tax problem. I suggest to the member for Kitchener that that was not what property tax reform was all about from the beginning.

The member for Simcoe East was a little bit closer when he talked about it serving the purpose of taking education off the property tax. That was to have been the original message, to get control of educational funding and be able to say to the public, "We have taken education off the property tax." That was residential taxes only, let's stress that fact, never business, which was always going to continue to pay 100% of its share for education. But they were going to try and take it off the residential tax.

I hope the members opposite haven't failed to recognize that they didn't achieve that end, that they've had to retreat from that goal and that their own government is now going to have the unprecedented power, without legislation, power of cabinet, to impose educational taxes on communities. I'm not sure how this fixes the problem that the member for Kitchener might have thought existed with property tax to begin with. It seems to me we have compounded the problems of the poor, beleaguered property taxpayer when you have the provincial government coming in and imposing taxes directly, by fiat, by cabinet regulation, without any public debate or decision about what that tax should be.

Our colleague the member for Scarborough-Agincourt and the critic for finance says there are no less than 25 different taxes, new taxes, that can be imposed directly by the government through regulation. This is incredible. How have they simplified? How have they made the property tax system more fair when this government can now, through cabinet, impose 25 different taxes on property taxpayers?

I say to the member for Simcoe East who says, "Look for the good parts," why do seniors need protection if your property taxes aren't going to go up?

The Acting Speaker: The member for Kitchener has two minutes to respond.

Mr Wettlaufer: I'd like to thank the members for Algoma-Manitoulin, Fort York, Simcoe East and Fort William for adding to this debate.

It was interesting that the member for Fort York said that the opposition members had a duty to expose. I might say that they have a duty to oppose, and that's exactly what they've been doing every step of the way, every time this government tries to do anything that will create jobs.

Part of the reason for this legislation is to make municipal governments accountable. All governments are supposed to be accountable to the taxpayer, but it will be incumbent on municipal governments to be accountable to the taxpayers for the local property taxes.

1630

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs McLeod: I'm happy to participate, although very briefly, since we're past the seven-hour mark and down to 10 minutes' participation per member in this debate. But I'm happy to participate because I recognize the significance of this piece of legislation as one relatively minor set of the parts of the property tax proposals coming from this government.

Our critic for finance, the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, recognized that Bill 149 was the second of two major bills on property tax reform and that this will be the most dramatic change in property tax in the history of Ontario. So it is significant. I agree it's a major reform. What I don't agree with is that it has been very well thought out. You might wonder why the government couldn't have given us one act to encompass all of their property tax reform proposals. The fact is, they didn't get their act together. In fact, their act has been changing so regularly that it wouldn't surprise me if we have to see further pieces of legislation.

Actually, I should maybe retract that statement because it seems to me that between Bill 160 and Bill 149 the government has given itself so much power to set taxation through regulation, certainly the power to set education taxes through regulation, and as our finance critic has said, some 25 other areas in which they can set taxation through regulation, that I guess they won't actually have to bring in any more acts to do with taxation. They'll just do it all by cabinet fiat, so that property taxes will be increased, as the government may see fit in the future, to pay for its income tax cut. Those taxes can be increased without there ever being a debate in the Legislature and without there ever being a vote in the Legislature.

I can't say more strongly how abhorrent that should be to every member of the Legislature. This is such a violation of democratic process. It is such a violation of the basic democratic concept of no taxation without representation, that that representation should be turned over to the control of the few members of cabinet who will be making these decisions, that I suspect it is unconstitutional. We, as opposition members, do not have the financial resources to launch a constitutional challenge, unfortunately, but I suspect others will when they realize

how huge the powers are that have been taken unto cabinet through Bill 149 and through a relevant piece, Bill 160, in which the government takes over control of education taxation.

I want to argue very strongly that this Bill 149, the second part of the legislative proposals on property tax reform, is not really about property tax reform at all. I go back to something which the member for Simcoe East perhaps inadvertently referred to as the starting point for all of this, and that was the government's desire to take over education funding. In order to take over education funding, they had to take over education taxation. Clearly they wanted control of education funding because they needed to get $1 billion out of education to pay for the tax cut, and that is absolutely factual. The government has said publicly that they want $1 billion. Mike Harris has said publicly he needs $1 billion.

The first step, and I remind members: Take us back to the scene that this government tried to set for its property tax reform. You remember mega-week? I think it was back in January. I ask the member for Algoma-Manitoulin for confirmation of that. I think it was back in January. But I remember clearly that the first day of the week was Monday and the first announcement of mega-week was to be the great announcement —

Mr Marchese: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With all apologies to the member for Fort William, there is no quorum in the House. Would you check?

The Acting Speaker: Would you check for a quorum, please?

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Fort William.

Mrs McLeod: I was just at the point of reminding members that the first announcement of mega-week, which was the prelude to the set of announcements about property tax reform, was to say they were taking education off the property tax. I say again that was because the government had a need to get control of education costs and to be able to make the cuts, which the Premier has publicly said he needs to make in order to pay for his tax cut.

The government then went on for the rest of mega-week to do the downloading part, which is the foundation of their property tax reform. The government, of course, has had to retreat from that. We keep asking for numbers. Members keep talking about this being more fair. I don't know how we can determine what is fair when we don't know what is actually going to happen to property taxes in different communities. We haven't seen those numbers from the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I've asked the Minister of Education to give me figures on what's going to happen when the government applies its residential tax for education. They've said, "We don't have those figures, but maybe the Ministry of Finance does." How can we know what's going to be fair until we see what a uniform mill rate for educational purposes does to communities across this province?

I don't think it's any surprise that the government isn't giving us numbers. I suspect it's because the government still doesn't have the numbers. This government has spun around so many times, so fast on the aspects of its downloading that it does not know what is going to happen to property taxes. Remember, one of the major retreats was on the issue of long-term care. Thank goodness they retreated on that. It was one of the most horrendous of the dumps of social programs on to the municipal property tax base.

I go back to some fundamental principles about property tax reform: the whole concept of disentanglement. It was never supposed to be downloading. It was supposed to be disentanglement. The fundamental principle was that the people who are responsible for making decisions about programs should as much as possible pay for those programs. The second fundamental principle was that property tax should not be used as a basis to pay for social programs because social programs are intended to provide some equity from community to community and therefore social programs should be the provincial government's responsibility.

As you disentangle, the idea was that the province would pick up more and more 100% of the responsibility for the social programs, which it would then manage, make decisions about and pay for. But that is not the kind of property tax reform which we have here. We have a great mess of re-entanglement and we have greater sharing on the part of the municipalities and the property taxpayers for social programs. This is what the David Crombie panel, the Who Does What panel, said is absolutely unacceptable. Thank goodness the government retreated from some of the worst parts of that dumping of social programs.

The government is still trying to convince us that this is revenue-neutral, as they keep changing the numbers and changing the numbers and it's still not revenue-neutral. It still constitutes some $667 million in net offload on to the municipalities and the government won't talk to us about what that's going to do in terms of impact on property tax. Add that download on top of the uniform mill rate and let's ask what's going to happen to property taxes. The government hasn't guaranteed, I don't think, that there'll be no property tax increase anywhere. The Minister of Education has not said that every community is going to see a 50% reduction in its residential assessment for education. They made that clear. It's 50% on average across the province, and then they're going to come in with a uniform mill rate and some day we'll see what it's actually going to mean community by community.

I can tell you, when it comes to the commercial tax for education purposes, that small businesses in my community are getting very concerned. They know they have to pick up the downloaded costs from this government on to the property tax base. They know they also have to pay 100% of the costs for education and they have no idea

how the provincial government is going to come in and levy those taxes.

It's quite clear that their taxes cannot go down; they must go up. It's quite clear that relieving businesses of the business occupancy tax, which the municipalities may have to put back in order to make up for the fact it was their revenue the government took away — even if they do have that business occupancy tax relief, it's not going to make up for the fact that they're still paying 100% of their costs for education and their share of the downloaded cost on to municipalities. So businesses in my community are getting very worried. They want to know what their taxes are going to look like, and in this area, not only do we not have numbers from the government, the government has no plan.

1640

Last week I asked the Ministry of Education, what are you going to do about the commercial tax for education? They said, "We haven't decided yet." This government is making up its tax policy literally on a day-by-day and week-by-week basis, and when something doesn't fly or the numbers don't add up they step back a bit and then they take another step forward and try and sort it out.

Ten minutes go very quickly, especially when you get a quorum call in the middle, Mr Speaker. Let me end with just one question. I think it is important to have protection for seniors from any property tax increase, but if this government insists that property taxes are going to go down under this bill, and we've certainly heard that, I wonder why in both bills they've had to provide protection for seniors from property tax increases. Tell us at least which of those seniors are going to need that protection and then let's debate about whether protecting seniors from property tax increases and leaving them with a deferred debt is really offering them very much protection at all. It seems to me what we really need is property tax reform that works to take costs off the property tax base.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Ms Martel: I want to reinforce what the member for Fort William has said with respect to the business occupancy tax. As much as the government in some of the speeches that were made today would like to try and say, "We're only talking about this particular bill," it is true that 149 flows directly from 106 and those two things flow directly from the Who Does What panel, which also includes all of the download that municipalities right across this province are going to have to cope with beginning January 1.

With respect to the business occupancy tax, the government has clearly tried to argue that it's an archaic form of tax and therefore we're much better off because we wipe it out entirely. The government forgets to tell the public that by doing that, you take $1.6 billion out of the system and communities right across this province have to make up for that. Municipal governments have to find some way to bring that revenue back into their coffers because that revenue was paying for services already in those municipalities. While the government members might like to say this was archaic, at least it was a progressive form of taxation because it recognized that companies with higher profits, like banks, would have a different tax rate assessed to them. So you would have a bank taxed at a 75% rate and a small mom-and-pop shop or a barber shop, for example, assessed at 30%.

The position the municipalities are going to find themselves in now with respect to this is that they're going to have to go back either to the residential property tax base and whack homeowners to try and make up this difference or they're going to have no choice but to go back to the small businesses in our communities, the mom-and-pop shops, and hit them as well. The estimate in the city of Toronto alone is that some of the bank tower folks are going to save $3 million and a lot of those small businesses, because of those changes in tax rates, are going to pay a heck of a lot more than they pay now. That's the effect of that change.

Mr Grimmett: I'd like to take a couple of minutes to make a few comments on the speech by the member for Fort William. I'm surprised that the member, being from northern Ontario, didn't refer to the sections of the bill that relate to some issues of great significance in the north, such as the way the bill treats rights of way. Rights of way are a very important assessment issue that's been lingering for a long time in Ontario. For years now we've had this patchwork of rights of way across the province that were treated differently under all the different assessment regimes that exist throughout the patchwork quilt that has been building in Ontario for decades and decades. Rights of way have become a problem in terms of how they are going to be dealt with from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Companies that own these rights of way expressed their concern to the provincial government over the years and said, "Will you please straighten out the assessment situation for rights of way across the province so that in some of these large areas in northern Ontario we know from one year to the next how much we're going to be assessed?" So what we tried to do in Bill 149 is provide some certainty to the owners of rights of way. We've tried to provide some certainty so that there are nine different geographical regions in the province, and in those regions the province will set the rate so that the assessment will be based on acreage and on a fair distribution of assessment so that these companies that have rights of way know that from one year to the next there won't be dramatic shifts in the assessment they'll have to deal with. That's a very important issue in northern Ontario.

There's another important issue as well, and that's payments in lieu. Up until now, my friends in municipal government tell me, payments in lieu have been an issue for negotiation between municipalities and the province where the municipal leaders who are able to get in and talk to the provincial leaders get the rates they want and maybe others don't. We're trying to set up a system whereby it's right there in the regulations. They will know from one year to the next what the payments in lieu will be for each municipality.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I want to comment on the points made by the member for Fort William. As

usual, they were well thought out and researched and of course given. One of the common themes throughout the member's speech was that the government doesn't know. If the government does know, then it's not telling us. We've asked them for impact studies — no impact studies. We asked them what their intentions are in one area of taxation — well, they really don't know, but the next day it may be something else.

I'm concerned, like the member for Fort William said the small businesses are concerned in her area, that small business, business in general, can't plan on the future. We're only three months away from a year-end. We're three months away from the year-end of municipalities. We're told by the assessment division of the finance ministry that they can't possibly be ready to have the rolls in the hands of municipalities so they can budget for the next year. I can understand why there's a lot of concern, worry and in some cases maybe even some suspicion on the part of government.

I suggest that there are warnings in all of this. The business occupancy tax has been discussed by several members. Well, it's very nice of the government to give away the revenue of municipalities, but how's it going to be replaced? If you give away a dollar of revenue that had been allocated to the municipalities, they're going to have to make it up on the residential tax.

In the area of seniors, it's going to essentially become a lien on their home if they have to go to the municipality and ask for any deferment of tax.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I listened with interest to the comments of the member for Fort William, albeit interrupted by a quorum call. The government once again was not able to keep a quorum in the House. It's too bad she had to be interrupted, but I listened with great interest because I know she's particularly interested these days in the education bill and has been speaking I think quite eloquently on that bill. It's clear that she's done a lot of analysis in terms of the implications. I listen closely when she's talking about educational matters and I think it's important.

When government members say, "Just speak to the bill; you're not speaking to the bill," quite often these bills are interrelated and I find it distressing that government members often don't see that. When you take one of these bills in isolation and think that's it all by itself and it's only going to impact in its own way in that particular direction, that isn't so. As the member for Fort William was saying, as you look at the complexities and the cumulative effect of all these different taxation bills on our communities, it's going to have a severe impact on some.

As the member for Fort William was saying, one of the biggest problems is that the government doesn't know. We are unable to go back to our communities and, like the businesses in Fort William, I am hearing the same thing. Small businesses in my community are quite terrified about what's going to happen to them because they don't have any idea. They ask me how much they're going to be paying. I have to say: "I don't know. The government will not tell us. They don't know what the commercial education tax is going to be." This is all going to happen in a couple of months. They don't know how the business occupancy tax change is going to affect them. They don't know how this is going to affect them yet.

This government is moving too quickly again, and yet another bill.

1650

The Acting Speaker: The member for Fort William has two minutes to respond.

Mrs McLeod: I thank all my colleagues for their comments. I suggest to the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay that when I'm allowed only 10 minutes to address an issue that the government considers to be of some significance, I am going to focus on the parts of the bill or in fact the parts of the government initiative that I consider significant, although I agree with the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay that the rights-of-way issue in northern Ontario is going to become very significant indeed if the government decides it's going to come in with a uniform mill rate for commercial assessment and impose that on all those areas across northern Ontario.

What for me is most significant in the government's so-called property tax reform is the dumping on the property taxpayer. The government will argue that it's not going to lead to an increase in property taxes in the first year, particularly if municipalities are able to find that 2% in efficiencies, which means cuts in services that municipalities need to provide to their residents. If they can find those cuts in services and if the government buffers them with their onetime funding, we may not see immediate increases in our property tax.

But I'm concerned about the fact that municipalities are going to have to go cap in hand to get any relief from this government's offloading, making application for the one-time-only funds. I'm probably even more concerned if the one-time-only funds go on in this way, as sort of a charitable handout to municipalities, because we'll be right back to old-style porkbarrelling politics where you have to be well connected before you're get the kind of dollars you need to deliver the services to your residents.

I'm really concerned that what's going to happen is that the funds will be one-time-only and that we are going to see increases in property tax down the road. I believe it is completely unacceptable for this government to dump on to property taxpayers the burden of providing social programs which are going to grow in cost so that this government can provide a $5-billion cut in income tax. I think they are providing the cut to those who need it least and punishing those who need help most.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Martel: It's a pleasure, in the short time I have, 10 minutes, to participate in this important debate on Bill 149. The bill has to be taken in context with its companion piece of legislation, which this House already passed, Bill 106, and also with the download, the dumping, the offloading that this government is handing to municipalities, because of course it's all part and parcel of the same thing. It comes from the Who Does What recommendations and facilitates how the government will steal reve-

nues from municipalities and how the government will also at the same time dump any number of new, enormous costs on to those same municipalities and force them to cope with the cut in services, the huge increase in property taxes and/or both which will occur as a consequence.

To look at Bill 149 and focus first on the gross receipts tax, I want to give members in this House some examples of the loss of revenue that some of the communities in my riding are going to face. They have a particular concern, given all the other dumping that's going to occur, that not only do they have to assume enormous new costs, but the way of bringing in revenues to cope with some of that is also being taken away from them.

The bill says very clearly in the explanatory note: "The percentage of the existing gross receipts tax for telephone and telegraph companies in areas with municipal organization, which is currently set at 5%, will be prescribed by regulation. Starting in 1998 the tax will be paid to the province." We would be better to say, "The tax will be grabbed by the province," because the fact is that this is one of the areas in the download where the province grabs back some of the revenue that used to go to municipalities and forces them into an even more difficult position than they are already in.

One of my small communities, the township of Casimir, Jennings and Appleby, has written to Minister Leach about this. It's part of a resolution that was put out by North York, I understand, calling on the provicial government to withdraw from this direction, to withdraw it from this bill. They said in particular, and I quote because they say it better than I can:

"Whereas as part of the downloading on municipalities the province of Ontario is grabbing the 5% telephone gross receipt tax paid by telephone companies for use of municipal right of way; and

"Whereas the taking away" — or grabbing or stealing — "of the gross receipts tax not only means an immediate loss of over $22,000 to our municipality but also has a potential impact because of the emerging fibre optics industry coming through our community; and

"Whereas the future demand for space in our right of ways could amount to hundreds of millions in future revenues to Ontario municipalities; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario will be grabbing" — stealing — "these revenues to reduce its costs instead of being used to offset property taxes, since it is the municipal right of ways which are being used;

"Therefore be it resolved that the province of Ontario not take away the gross receipts tax now collected by Ontario municipalities, or if they do do it, then the province of Ontario must allow municipalities to be compensated for the right to use our rights of way."

In this small community of 681 households, the revenue lost for this community is $22,000. Add to that the $570 per household that residents in this community will now pay for OPP policing; and add to that the cost of ambulance service which they will now cover a portion of, because in that part of the riding, that is shared among four municipalities; add to that the increased welfare cost, the increased child care cost, the cost of social housing this community will have to assume because it has a small seniors' apartment building now run by Ontario Housing which of course is going to be downloaded on to them, and you can see that the folks in the municipality of the township of Casimir, Jennings and Appleby are going to suffer a huge increase in property taxes and they are going to have their services cut as well. There is no way for them to cope.

The minister repeating again and again that this is a wash is totally ridiculous, totally out of touch with reality. It shows again that the government has had no regard for the fine details, the small print, the important details, and how all of the dumping is going to affect municipalities, particularly small ones in northern Ontario. That's the impact on one municipality.

The town of Nickel Centre in my community, a little larger: Their loss with respect to the province stealing or grabbing the gross receipts tax is a loss of $240,530 that this community would have normally received from Bell Canada, flowed to the province, then the province flowing to this municipality. That's why this community as well supported the resolution from North York calling on the government to either continue to give the money to the people it should go to — the municipalities — or to give the municipalities some compensation for that loss.

The mayor said, "Not only are these downloading costs and responsibilities on us, they are also taking away all of our sources of revenue." That was Mayor Stan Hayduk at the end of June talking to the media about how this municipality is going to try and cope.

The city of Sudbury has also calculated the loss it will experience because of the province stealing the gross receipts tax through the download exercise. In the case of the city of Sudbury, the loss of revenue is in the order of $600,000 annually because of what the province is doing, a $600,000 loss that they have to make up now through the addition of increased property taxes or by cutting services in other areas and flowing the money to cover the cost of other services.

Finally, the regional municipality of Sudbury: The loss to the region because of the province grabbing the gross receipts tax is a loss of $2.4 million that the region would normally receive from Bell Canada, flowed through to the province and then flowed on to the municipality — $2.4 million. It's no wonder that the region as of last week — and we're waiting for the new figures that will come when we have some new announcements on October 6 — is looking at new additional costs in the order of $73.5 million because of the government's download, because of the government's dumping of all these new costs and services on to municipalities.

In this bill, the effect of the changes, with respect to the gross receipts tax and the province grabbing or stealing that, is a significant revenue loss in many municipalities, particularly in small northern municipalities which don't have a rich tax base and which have to rely on receiving this money from Bell Canada for use of municipal rights of way. The government is taking that money through this

bill, and those municipalities are going to be forced to raise property taxes or cut services or a combination of both to make up the difference.

A second point in Bill 149 which I believe is going to cause huge discrepancies in terms of taxation right across the province has to do with the taxation of certain railway and power utility lands. The bill says: "New provisions provide for the taxation of railway roadways and transmission and power corridors for municipal purposes. The taxes will be determined under the regulations."

1700

The opposition has been trying to find out from the Minister of Finance whether this means there will be a uniform tax rate set for railway lands, set for Hydro, set for other utilities, and the reason this is important is that if you just take CN, for example, Canadian National — and I come from a community where Canadian National is the single most important employer — if the government applies a uniform tax rate through the regulations for CN property, that will affect my small community of 4,000 much differently than it will affect the city of Toronto, and my concern is there's going to be a great disparity if the government is going to use the uniform tax rate across municipalities in this province.

My community cannot afford to be taxed at a rate that might be applied on CN lands in downtown Toronto. We cannot afford that in our community of 4,100, with all the other costs the government is downloading, but we have no information from this government to date with respect to how the government is going to apply that tax rate or what the tax rate will be, because it doesn't appear in the bill. It appears in the regulations, which we haven't seen yet.

Finally, a third point from the bill relates to rebates to charities and similar organizations. The bill allows municipalities to give rebates to eligible charities and similar organizations, to give them tax relief. For goodness' sake, every municipality across this province is facing a huge download cost at the behest of this government, on behalf of this government. What municipality is going to be in any financial shape to give a tax rebate to a charity for anything? They are going to be looking at huge property tax increases, huge cuts to services or a combination of both to deal with the government offload. To have this in this bill is an insult to municipalities that are going to pay far more under this government's download scheme.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'd just like to make a couple of comments on the presentation made by the member for Sudbury East. The majority of the presentation was on the elimination or the transfer of the gross receipt tax which presently is a municipal tax on services, as the member said, on municipal rights of way. The telephone lines from Bell Canada pay a percentage of their gross receipts in the municipality for the use of that right of way.

As the Who Does What panel looked at the issue, they came to the conclusion that that is not a tax on property as other properties. It's not based on the assessed value of the lines, it's based on income, and that should be an income tax. The Who Does What panel recommended to the government that, as we're looking at the realignment of services between the provincial and municipal governments, we look at transferring the gross receipt tax to the province in return for other services that would also go to the province, such as some of the costs of education.

I would also like to point out that the name of the act is the Fair Municipal Finance Act, and the part as it relates to payment in lieu of taxes by the province is a very important part of the bill, to make sure that the province pays fairly for the properties they utilize and own in the municipality. Presently, only properties that are owned by the province get payment in lieu. The new act will provide the ability of the province to grant in lieu on properties that are owned by municipal or federal governments but are occupied by the provincial government. We think that if the province is utilizing those buildings, they should pay their fair share.

It also allows the regulations to allow the payment of heads-and-beds tax on provincial facilities that are no longer in use but are still sitting there taking up space and using the services of the municipalities.

Mr Bradley: I enjoyed the speech, because it pointed out the ramifications of the downloading of responsibilities, both financial and physical, by the provincial government of Mike Harris on the municipalities of Ontario. I'm sure the member knew that the municipalities he represents were at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference in Toronto where they overwhelmingly expressed their disgust with the activity of the provincial government in downloading all these financial responsibilities.

Some of them are having to assume miles upon miles and kilometres upon kilometres of roads that were provincially owned and operated previously and will find this to be very onerous on those municipalities. Now the upkeep of those roads will have to be balanced against the needs in the community that are out there, the genuine needs that normally a municipality would have to meet. I'm sure the Minister of Transportation, if he had his way, would want to retain those roads under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, because that would be the fair thing to do.

I was also pleased to hear from one of my favourite mayors, Hazel McCallion of Mississauga, who today was denouncing the government for its downloading activities and the general way it's treating municipalities. I've always known Hazel to be very fairminded and very restrained in expressing her views. Once in a while she has to come out publicly and say what she thinks. I happen to agree with Hazel on this occasion again, that the downloading on municipalities and the treatment of municipalities is despicable and the government should be involved in another retreat.

Mr Marchese: I want to thank my friend from Sudbury East for again doing a good job of explaining the duplicitous nature of this government, because all the while this government proclaims to be a friend of munici-

palities. They proclaim their camaraderie with each other. "We're on your side," they say. They're dumping so much on the municipalities, who in turn are going to have to dump on the municipal taxpayers and tenants. Shakespeare has always been right in saying, "Fair is foul and foul is fair." You've got to be able to see it and many of the people in Ontario are beginning to see, through the small windows these people provide from time to time, the real nature of what these people are all about.

The member for Sudbury East had a number of petitions and other sources of information that speak about the gross receipts tax for telephone companies and the impact that would have on those communities such as Casimir. The petition explains there would be an immediate loss of $22,000. It may not seem like a lot to these guys over here but to a little community of 600 people it's a lot of money.

This is a tax grab on all municipalities, but the ones it will hurt are the tiny, little communities across Ontario where these people profess to be friends of these Tory communities and Tory councillors that are out there. These people are speaking out. These taxpayers are saying fair is foul and foul is fair, and we are seeing it. I want to thank the member for Sudbury East for bringing this to our attention once again.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): It's great to have lectures on what municipalities like and don't like about our government and think about what municipalities liked and didn't like about the former NDP government or the former Liberal government.

I remember very fondly the incredible response of the municipalities to the Liberal commercial concentration tax. I'm sure the member for St Catharines remembers the commercial concentration tax, the one most singular attack on small business in this province. It's small business that had to rent their office space in these big conglomerate offices, and the commercial concentration tax, guess what it taxed? It taxed the parking lot and the parking garage.

As far as the relationship with the municipalities, of course, the previous NDP government had a wonderful relationship from the time they passed the social contract legislation. The municipalities really liked that legislation and it helped everybody who was a property taxpayer within those municipalities that had to carry the burden of that legislation. I think before our friends across the floor get up and start saying what the municipalities feel about what our government is doing, they would do well to recognize that some of the things that our government is doing are the things that municipalities have asked governments to do for more than a decade, even going back to our previous government.

Finally, isn't it interesting, our government has had the courage to do them and to make the decisions that needed to be made, and I'm very pleased about that.

1710

Ms Martel: I want to thank the members for Oxford, St Catharines, Fort York and Mississauga South for their remarks. I want to say to the member for Oxford, it's all well and good for the government to view this as a transfer of gross receipts tax to the province. The fact is, it's theft, it's stealing, it's grabbing, it's ripping them off. It's taking away revenue that belongs to the municipalities because the rights of way cross those municipal lands, and the only reason the province was ever involved is the province acted as the vehicle to transfer money from Bell Canada to the province to those municipalities.

What you have now is the government just out and out stealing those revenues from those municipalities for use that Bell Canada makes of those municipal rights of way. That's what's happening here. It has nothing to do with the transfers. It's a grab of their revenue. You make it even more difficult for them to find the ways and means to pay for all of your dumping when you grab revenue like that.

Now with respect to the comments from the member for Mississauga South, who says their government is doing what municipalities have asked them to do for more than a decade, I would be very surprised to learn that the regional municipality of Sudbury asked for a previous government to dump $73 million of new costs on to regional taxpayers' heads.

I'm sorry. I have been a member for 10 years. I have never heard the regional municipality ask to have the costs of social housing, policing, ambulances, public transit, public health, assessment services, sewer and water inspections, libraries, child care, welfare, dumped on to the municipal tax base. Even Crombie in his report said we shouldn't be dumping soft services on to municipalities. This is a dump. It will result in huge property tax increases, loss of services and both in many, many municipalities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Further debate?

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the House today to support the Fair Municipal Finance Act, Bill 149.

In Ontario, there has long been a recognized problem with property and business tax assessment. My constituents in Scarborough West have paid too much realty and education taxes for decades. Older homes in Toronto with lower historical costs, pre-1950, have been getting a tax break and my constituents, with historic values of their newer homes, post-1950, have paid too much.

Until now, taxes have been based on historic costs. My constituents in Scarborough West have paid far more taxes than those people in Rosedale, Lawrence Park, Forest Hill and the Annex. The homes of the affluent have a higher market value but lower historical costs, upon which the tax rate has been based. Torontonians have been getting a big tax break and my constituents, both tenants and homeowners, have paid far too much. Scarborough West residents, like all of Scarborough residents, will have lower realty taxes, and that will be music to their ears. Even the Toronto Star predicted lower realty taxes for Scarborough residents.

Under these new rules in Bill 149, seniors, the disabled and small business will be protected from real estate tax increases, should they occur. We want to protect seniors

and the disabled from having to sell their homes because they can no longer afford to pay the realty taxes. Many seniors have worked their whole lives to pay for a home and have lived their whole lives in their homes with their families. I applaud the commitment of this government to help senior citizens afford to stay in their homes.

The senior years already bear a lot of anxiety. Anxiety and stress leads to poor health. We want to relieve that stress and we want to ensure that seniors can stay where they have lived. Our tax policy should not institutionalize people and our tax policy should not confiscate life savings. Seniors have a right to enjoy their homes. They have a right to enjoy the benefits that they have paid for, for decades. I support seniors. I'll be one shortly. We must remember that these are the people who built this province and we must work to protect them. We're empowering municipalities to make sure that seniors are protected.

Disabled people have many challenges living independently. They have to deal with accessibility issues and have to develop unique ways of doing things to perform the household chores that many of us take for granted. They certainly don't need the additional challenge of higher property taxes. This government is showing its support for disabled Ontarians in trying to help them as they work against sometimes formidable obstacles to live a free and independent life. We are protecting the disabled from property tax hikes. We're allowing municipalities to have special tax status for the disabled.

Bill 149, the Fair Municipal Finance Act, also allows municipalities to protect small business. Small business is the backbone of the economy of Ontario. Some 80% to 90% of all new jobs are created by small business. Small business employs 80% of all people working in the private sector. Unemployment is down dramatically and we all have small business to thank for that.

For a big business it takes probably $100,000 to $200,000 in capital to create a job. For $10,000, small business creates two or three jobs. Putting people to work is usually taking them off welfare. The taxpayer wins twice. Welfare recipients, now with jobs, are paying taxes; we're not paying them. Small businesses are usually owned by Ontarians. They're going to stay here. Unlike multinational corporations that are going to leave at the least change in the economic wind, small business is going to stay in Ontario.

You know, you can't rent a commercial space in Scarborough over 50,000 square feet right now, but there are lots of vacancies for small operations and we have to do something to fill those industrial units and small offices — small today, but big employers tomorrow. Knob Hill Farms was started by Steve Stavro with a small grocery store on the corner of Coxwell and Queen. Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, the richest man in North America, started out as a small business.

For years, governments have introduced measures that are prohibitive to small business. New business owners often find themselves burdened with red tape and high taxes. This bill will give the municipalities the power to set up a multi-tiered system of business taxes. Basically, they will have the ability to help out small local business owners by giving them a lower tax rate.

Mr Marchese: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: Is there a quorum in the House?

The Deputy Speaker: Would you please verify if we have a quorum or not?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Scarborough West.

Mr Jim Brown: You know, Bill 149 also recognizes the great work of charities in our Ontario communities. This bill gives the municipality the ability to give charitable organizations tax rebates on their commercial properties up to 40% of their tax bill. That's money that can go to many good causes. In my own community I've seen the work of Variety Village, the Lions Club, the Red Cross, Salvation Army and dozens more. These organizations not only improve community life, but without them, Scarborough wouldn't be a community. When people give money to Variety Village, they want it to go to disabled kids. They don't really want it to go to fixing roads and garbage pickup.

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It's unreasonable to expect a charity to pay the same taxes as a business that's out for profit. This bill recognizes that and sets a framework to protect our charitable organizations.

Overall, the Fair Municipal Finance Act addresses a number of inequities in the existing property tax system. Bill 149 provides the foundation for an even fairer and more flexible tax structure. This bill shows how caring and concerned for the most vulnerable members of society our government is. This bill will help charities do their important work. This bill will help small business flourish and grow. This bill will protect seniors. It is good for small business, and what's good for small business is good for Ontario. We're looking after seniors, the disabled, charities, the small entrepreneur.

I ask all members of this Legislature to support Bill 149, the Fair Municipal Finance Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Question or comments?

Mr Crozier: I want to take part of my two minutes to respond to the member for Scarborough West when he says it protects seniors. I want seniors and the disabled to understand very clearly that this protection comes at a cost, because if you apply to a municipality to have your taxes deferred, and not reduced — they are only going to be deferred. They will have to be paid at a later time and/or your estate is going to have to pay. Many seniors are concerned about an estate that they've accumulated that they want to leave to their loved ones.

Let it be very, very clear — and I hope to the government members — that it doesn't protect them at all. All it does is defer the tax to a later date. You're going to have to pay it in the end.

Municipalities that defer these taxes still have ongoing expenses at the same time. What are they going to have to do? They're going to have to make up that amount of tax deferral because they have a cash flow problem with what this government is doing to them. They'll have to, as I say, make up for those taxes in the meantime.

As we've heard before, the government says a lot about, "We're helping small business; we're getting rid of the business occupancy tax." That's going to have to be made up as well. If this government is so generous and I'm the mayor of a town and I'm trying to balance a budget — in fact I have to balance it by law — then if you give some of my tax revenue away, I'm going to have to go to the residences. In fact, I'm going to have to go to those very charities, to those very elderly, to those very disabled to make up for the government's generous giveaway of the business occupancy tax.

Mr Marchese: To the member for Scarborough West, he too has a duty to build myths. That's what this is all about. He talks about seniors as if somehow they really care. I know everybody cares, but these people pretend that they really care about the people they're whacking with the fair tax bill.

Actual value assessment is like market value assessment and it whacks seniors, people who have devoted their lives just to their little home. Yes, they can defer their payments, but it's a deferred debt that these people are engaged in. They're not protected. Look at the user fee they apply to seniors on the prescription drugs. That was a whack on seniors. They did that.

Look at the business occupancy tax, the $1.6 billion that's taken away. Where banks used to pay more, now they get a big break. At what cost? The residential person is going to have to pay for that, or small business people. This guy claims that seniors and small business are going to get a break. With the business occupancy tax being removed, it's got to be made up somehow.

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe that the member should be referring to people on either side of the House by the designation of their riding.

Mr Marchese: On the whole issue of the business occupancy tax, residents and small business are going to have pay. Yet this man from Scarborough West professes to say that he's a friend of seniors, he's a friend of small business. The social assistance reform bill that we're dealing with throws people out on the street at the age 60 to 64. A large number of these people are widows. He talks about rebates to charity. Somebody has got to pay. The municipalities have got to pay, and the property tax people, the taxpayers have to pay for that.

Mr Grimmett: I'm pleased to make some comments about the speech just made by the member for Scarborough West, a well-known, compassionate friend of seniors and charities and defender of small business. I know in his professional career he's had a lot of work to do with small business. I think it's important for the public to recognize that Bill 149 contains a very well created and well-planned section to deal with seniors and to deal with the deferral of taxes that seniors might have.

In my riding I've met with seniors who have come to me and shown me the plans that exist in other provinces. Prince Edward Island and British Columbia have similar plans to what's set out in Bill 106 and 149 for seniors. It's something that's been around for a little while in other jurisdictions. I don't know why we haven't adopted it in Ontario previous to now, but we're taking action to provide seniors with the right to defer their taxes. That's something the British Columbia government and the Prince Edward Island government have done for some time.

In both of those provinces they recognized that when there was a deferral, there was a need for a municipality to find that money elsewhere. That's why you can't simply say to municipalities, "You've got to provide a break for the estate." The estate will eventually have to pay these taxes. When the seniors speak to me about needing a deferral, they recognize that their estate is going to have to pay those taxes at some point. They simply say: "We're on a fixed income. If we're going to have significant increases in taxes, and that could or could not happen, from one time to the next," they want to be able to defer that increase to their estate if necessary. That's what they're permitted to do. The people who come to me realize they don't want a free ride. Seniors don't want a free ride. They want to have the opportunity to defer those taxes.

Mr Bradley: I was wondering whether the member was going to mention — it's probably because of the new rules that restrict the member to 10 minutes — when he mentioned seniors, the impact of the removal of rent controls on the various buildings. There is some suggestion that perhaps, with the change in assessment and with the change in the rent control rules, that any savings in taxes would be passed along automatically to renters.

My concern is that the member forgot to mention — because I know he wouldn't deliberately do this; he inadvertently forgot to mention — that this government is terminating rent controls. Many of the seniors I know in the province who voted Conservative are shocked and surprised today to learn that the Conservative Party is getting rid of rent control. The senior is faced with the position now of either being a prisoner in his or her own apartment or, if the person moves out, the rent control is lost on that apartment. They're probably going to have to move into a new apartment where rent control doesn't apply. This will be difficult for seniors. They're going to be as annoyed with that as they were with the new fee every time they get a prescription, and funds that have to be paid, all these drugs that have to be paid for now, because they didn't hear Mike Harris of the Conservatives talk about that in the election campaign at all. No mention was made at all of that.

I know that if the member had more than 10 minutes, he would have talked about the way the Mike Harris government is ending rent control, the way they're imposing new user fees on seniors, user fees that are going to be detrimental to the seniors in this province. I certainly will

speak out on their behalf if the government members don't want to

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The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Essex-Kent.

Mr Crozier: Essex South, sir. That's where the tomatoes come from.

Ms Churley: And what else?

Mr Crozier: And me.

I welcome the opportunity, albeit so briefly under the new rules, to speak on Bill 149. Because of my municipal background and my concern about the municipalities in my riding and the seniors in my riding, I only wish I would have more time, because this is a very serious issue. It will be the most dramatic change in property tax ever seen in Ontario.

Along with that dramatic change comes a very narrow time frame. I've talked to employees of the finance department who are involved in the area of assessment and they say they can't possibly do an effective and accurate job in the narrow time frame they've been given, because this is going to come into effect January 1.

What else happens at the first of the year? Well, municipalities want to see their tax rolls. The government no doubt knows what the impact of these changes is going to be on those assessment rolls but they haven't shared those with us, nor have they shared them with the municipalities. That's going to cause a budget crunch when it comes to the finances of municipalities early in 1998. I suspect there is a possibility that even the collection of interim taxes will be delayed.

We haven't seen any of the new tax rates that are involved in this. Today the Minister of Municipal Affairs assured us that the Who Does What downloading costs will be shared by the government with the municipalities by October 6, but that's only the overall impact of the downloading and how much the municipalities will be shortchanged. So initially, around October 1 they're going to say, "We know we've been shortchanged but we don't know what effect Bill 149 is going to have on the tax rates of the municipalities because we won't have the assessment rolls."

I want to return for just a moment to the question that was brought up by the member for Scarborough West and also by my colleague from St Catharines when it comes to seniors and the fact that seniors can defer their taxes. One of the government members said that the seniors in his riding understand that. They understand that they're on a fixed income, that municipal taxes in their view may be as high as they can afford, although I don't know why they should be concerned. If they listen to this government, their taxes in fact are going to be decreased. I rather doubt that, but that's what the government is telling them. Anyway, these seniors say: "That's all right. As long as you let me defer my tax, I'll be happy with that. I don't mind that it's going to become a lien on my estate."

We have seniors who have worked hard all their lives. They've built a home for themselves, in many cases just a modest home. They've paid it off. They can think back to the day they paid their mortgage off. They may have even burned it because that's a great way to celebrate that you've paid it off. Well, you know what? The minute they ask that taxes be deferred on that property, they're going to owe just like a mortgage again. They're going to have a debt accruing against it. I'm not so sure that seniors are going to find that a pretty thing to look at; to think that they've worked all their lives, they've paid their mortgage off, they own their home free and clear, but suddenly a debt is starting to accumulate against it again. I haven't had a senior yet who tells me that's a happy prospect. I don't think they like it at all. In fact, many seniors have said — and I guess we each in our own ridings have a range of seniors at different economic levels — "I'm now in a position, having paid that debt off, where I can maintain my modest income, but I don't want a debt to accrue against that property."

Small business is another area where there's concern on their part because the province has said, "We're going to get rid of the business occupancy tax. It's unfair. You shouldn't have to pay it," but if I'm a municipal councillor and I'm a residential property owner in that municipality, I'm going to have to say, "Who's going to make up that business occupancy tax?" If the provincial government has been so kind as to give that revenue away, who's going to make it up? Well, of course, the residential taxpayer is going to make it up. That's who's going to do it, and in some cases it's going to be quite significant.

In some municipalities — I've heard the figure mentioned earlier today that banks are taxed in the business occupancy area around 75%. Well, who wouldn't want to give the banks a break? I mean, after all, they're living in poverty, so we should give the banks a break. Any residential taxpayer in his right mind would say, "Yeah, I think the banks are being hard done by and I'd like to share with them and I think you should give them a property tax break so that my property taxes will then go up."

We all know that businesses can deduct their tax from their income, from their revenue, to arrive at their net income. But unfortunately home owners can't do that. So what you're taking is a cost off a business that can deduct it from their taxes and you're putting that cost on a residential homeowner who can't deduct that tax. Frankly, I don't think that's very fair. There may be fairer rates that you can charge business when it comes to business occupancy, but let's take into consideration that it's a legitimate business expense and that it's tax-deductible and that the people who are going to have to make it up, the poor residential taxpayers, are not going to be able to do that.

When my constituents come in and they want an explanation about this fairer tax plan, I point these out. If I only have the 10 minutes that I have here to speak to the Legislature, I obviously don't have an opportunity to explain any of what the government suggests are the good parts of this plan, so that's why I have to take the time —

Hon Mr Villeneuve: You never did that anyway, Bruce.

Mr Crozier: I always try to be fair. I don't mind giving credit where credit's due, but I also don't mind giving

somebody a whack if I don't think they're being fair, and I think the word "whack" was used earlier. I think you're whacking the residential taxpayer in this case and I don't mind at all telling somebody that this government is making them share that burden.

I want to mention just for a moment, when I think of my municipal days, about the gross receipts tax. It was suggested earlier that the Who Does What committee said, "This is not really a tax on property used, it's a tax on revenue." That's the way the tax was arrived at, but those businesses, telephone companies in particular, have property that sits in that community.

I suggest they have garbage that has to be picked up. I suggest they have sewers that have to service their property. There's a large exchange building Bell Telephone has in the town of Leamington. I suggest it has a bathroom in it someplace, so they use municipal hard services like that. If there happens to be a break-in, I suggest the police have to investigate it. The tax may be based on revenue, but it's because that capital asset of theirs is sitting in the community and needs service. So what's the government do? The answer is to take the money away because it's gross revenue. I suggest to you if you're really being fair you place an assessed value on the building and tax it in the normal way that every other business is taxed.

There are different ways to do this. There are ways to make tax fairer, and I think we've all tried to look at that over the years. These are only a few of the things I think residents, particularly residential taxpayers, should be aware of. They should understand exactly what the implications are, and then, as one member suggests, if they're happy with it, that's fine. I won't argue with them. I just want to make sure that the net effect of this is explained to them completely, and I think the net effect is going to cost the residential taxpayer more.

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The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Martel: To just follow up on some comments made by the member for Essex South with respect to the gross receipts tax, because earlier in my remarks I pointed out the loss of revenues that communities in the riding of Sudbury East and in the regional municipality of Sudbury are going to experience as a result of this particular piece of Bill 149.

The government can try and soften this any way they like. They can try and call it whatever they want to call it, but at the end of the day, the provincial government, through Bill 149, is going to grab, steal, take revenue that currently comes in to the municipalities that helps those municipal councils pay for other services in those communities, and that is the fact of the matter. It's another way that this province has manoeuvred to grab money back from municipalities while at the same time dumping more and increasing responsibilities, services and costs on to those same municipalities.

I'm not sure if the government backbenchers have any clear idea about what the cost is to municipalities in the areas that they represent, but in mine it's very clear. In one of my smallest communities, 681 households, the loss of revenue will be in the order of $22,000. That's at the same time as this government is dumping OPP costs on to that community, which in that district will result in an over $500 increase per household for that service. The same municipality is going to be hit with dealing with the cost of ambulance service, social housing — because they have a seniors' complex in their community — increased welfare costs, child care costs etc. This is a community that can't cope with the download as it currently exists, and now the government, through this bill, takes away yet another mechanism from that community to actually bring revenue in to try and help them cope with the download. That's happening in municipality after municipality across the province.

Mr McLean: I wanted to take the time to comment with regard to the comments the member for Essex South made in the Legislature this afternoon. He talks about a fair tax plan. I remember some time ago, between 1985 and 1990, when taxes increased in this province some 32 times. The same member's party increased the deficit of this province from approximately $26 billion to $49 billion. For the individual to talk about a fair tax plan, I remember the former Treasurer of this province who did away with the ad valorem tax of 8.5 cents a gallon and brought in the ad valorem tax which increased the tax so we now have some 14.7 cents on a litre of fuel.

So we talk about a fair tax, and now we're dealing with the market value assessment where municipalities will have the opportunity to deal with commercial assessment. They'll have the opportunity to deal with the 1,000-or-fewer-seat theatres that we have — a tax break for many people who are involved in the theatre and arts in this province. I think that's a step in the right direction.

The previous administration brought in a bunch more taxes and increased our deficit from about $47 billion or $49 billion to almost $100 billion. We were paying $1 million an hour in interest. There are 8,760 hours in a year. That works out to over approximately $9 billion extra we were paying, the second-highest expenditure in the province of Ontario.

I commend the treasurer for bringing in and lowering the budget in this province, because if somebody doesn't do it, I don't know who will. I can say to you that the seniors of this province are going to enjoy Bill 149.

These are some of the things that the member for Essex South should have talked about with regard to a fair tax plan. I say that this Bill 149 is fair to all.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Let's get the facts on the table. During the Robarts and Davis years, the public debt in this province up until 1985 went to $40 billion. The previous Liberal government added $10 billion to that and the NDP government added another $50 billion to that, for $100 billion. What are you doing right now? You are increasing it from the $100 billion that it was in 1995 to $120 billion that it will be by the year 2000, and you're doing that because you're giving people a tax cut. You shouldn't be giving any tax cuts until the deficit is down to zero.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There's too much noise.

Mr Gerretsen: Let's talk about one other thing. I know of no senior in this province — people who own their own homes, people who have paid off their mortgages, people who, generally speaking, live in older houses — who wants to have a lien put on their property because of the tax increase this act is allowing to take place.

We all know that older properties are more likely to be assessed higher, as opposed to the newer properties. You are saddling the seniors of this province with debts they don't want. These people were born during the Depression or born before the Depression. They know all about the Depression and they don't want to be saddled with debt.

I see the minister laughing there. You won't be laughing when that senior citizen who has not had a debt over the last 20 years, who does not have a credit card in his pocket, all of a sudden will be saddled with an extra $1,000 in debt, in a lien against their property for the next five or six years. It's easy to say their estate can pay it off. These people don't want to leave their kids debts, and your action right here is causing that. You should be ashamed of yourselves, all of you, for implementing this on the backs of the seniors of this province.

Ms Churley: I'm glad to respond to the comments made by the member from the area where tomatoes grow. I've eaten tomatoes from Essex South and they truly are delicious.

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel): I love them too.

Ms Churley: I'm glad to hear that.

I think in his 10 minutes he outlined many of the concerns that have been expressed by people here today and in the past when this bill has been discussed, and the members should pay attention. This is a legacy you're going to be leaving Ontario. You like to yell and scream about the deficit that the NDP government brought up. Yes, it's part of the legacy. I agree.

Perhaps some people don't agree with what we did, but I'll tell you something, we made a choice during the worst recession since the 1930s to try to keep people, absolutely in some cases, above destitution. We tried to help communities, small business. Perhaps it was wrong, but that was a choice we made. But we did not have to go out and borrow money to give people a 30% tax cut that mainly goes to the richest in the province, which is what this government is —

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Churley: I've only got two minutes here. Show a little bit of respect here. You'll have your chance.

That's what you're borrowing money for. Let's not joke about it, that is the reality. You're not just trying to deal with a deficit; you're borrowing money to give rich people a huge tax cut. That's the reality.

One of the aspects of this bill that really bothers me a lot, and I'll talk more about it in a few minutes, is that for the first time ever the province is going to be setting mill rates in our communities and municipalities. There's something very wrong with that and I'll be talking about it more in a few minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Essex South, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr Crozier: I too thank the members for Sudbury East, Simcoe East, Kingston and The Islands and Riverdale, and I thank the member for Riverdale for the commercial.

I'm really surprised. The minister said, when my friend from Simcoe East was speaking about debt, that it wasn't even anything I spoke about, and it wasn't. I was equally surprised that the member for Simcoe East would even have brought it up in the first place, but let's put it in very simple math since he has.

At the end of your mandate, according to your budget figures, the provincial debt is going to be at about $120 billion. Of that $120 billion, Conservative governments are going to be responsible for half of it. It's very simple math. You're going to be responsible for $60 billion of that debt.

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If I were the member of a party that was responsible for half the provincial debt, I'd keep it kind of quiet. The fact is that you go out and give a tax cut and you're borrowing every nickel of it. I can't imagine —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Can I ask the members on the government side, please come to order, including the Minister of Environment.

Mr Crozier: I'm surprised that you even brought it up. I'd like to go back, in the last 30 seconds I have, to the comments I made. I want to make it very clear that out of all this bill that we've talked about, those whom I'm most concerned about are the residential taxpayers. They're the ones who are going to take the hit for all the other things that you say you're giving away and making fairer. Of those residential taxpayers, believe me, in the end seniors and the disabled will be hurt the most.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Churley: This is the second of two major bills on changes to property taxes and the way we collect them. Other people have pointed that out. What is really worrisome, and it should be to all the members of the government as well, is that we have no information from your cabinet yet, from your minister, from the Premier. It is incredible. Speaker, your Premier said on the day he was elected, I believe, that they were going to run — I know you're neutral now. I'm speaking through you to the members.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Let's not provoke them — that they were going to run government like a business, but no business would ever, ever make such monumental changes without doing a full impact study, knowing what they're getting into. But because this government is downloading so many services and costs on to the municipalities, they don't seem to care about the impacts right now. They can just avoid looking at it. That is the legacy they're going to leave: a huge mess, huge costs to the municipalities.

We don't know. We can't tell our constituents about the impact of this and the other, the development charges bill. We cannot give them all the details, because the government admits it. When we ask them questions, "Give us more details," they say, "We don't have them yet." It's absolutely incredible.

This, the bill we're talking about today, is on top of the dumping of services on to municipalities, which include social housing, welfare, ambulance services, public transit — it's probably going to kill public transportation in the Toronto area — public health, libraries, child care, assessment services and soft services. That is all being downloaded on to the property taxes.

Then there is the elimination of the business occupancy tax. It takes about $1.6 billion out of the system. That's going to leave a shortfall to municipalities, which are having at the same time all these other services being downloaded, which is going to accumulate over time, have a cumulative effect, and we all know that in good times it's not such a problem.

I've been a city councillor, albeit for a very short time, and it was a good economic time, but even then I remember the pressures on the city, the government that at least used to be — I don't know what's going to happen in Toronto now, with the megacity coming into being — closest to the people, the incredible pressures on that municipality. We might be able to guess about the impact, as municipalities have — they've had some impact studies done — but in the long term when we go through another downturn in the economy, we don't know how that's going to affect the municipal tax base.

When you include the elimination of the business occupancy tax in this whole mix, you've got yet another $1.6 billion or so. Let's put that into some context. Let's look at the big banks. The big banks, which make incredible profits, are going to be saving, I believe the figure we were given, in taxes therefore about $3 million a year. Somebody else is going to have to make that up. That's the reality. Look at the people in your community. Think about the small businesses in your community, think about the seniors, think about homeowners and the lower-income and middle-income areas. Are they going to be the ones to make up for it? Somebody has to. Think about that. It's not so simple to say, "We're going to eliminate that." Well, of course, it is for this government, because they eliminate it. It's all handed down to the municipalities to deal with and then they don't have to worry about it.

While I'm on the subject of the elimination of the business occupancy tax, this government's approach to taxation, setting mill rates for the first time ever, which is absolutely incredible, and the effect — and I don't think this has been talked about very much in the House — on the business occupancy tax, I have several BIAs in my community, and I'm sure many other people do too. I've worked with them for years. You know how it works: The businesses get together and on a majority vote decide to form a BIA, a business improvement area. They pool their money. It's provincial legislation but the city collects the money. The local councillors sit on the board and they pool their money and improve their business areas together. It's made a huge difference in the small business areas in my community, as I'm sure it has for many.

These changes mean that now the businesses will no longer be paying that tax to the municipality, which they voted to do; the province will be collecting that tax as well. There is no mechanism to collect it from the business owner so what the government is saying is they're going to collect it from the owner of the building. I can tell you, in my riding that is not acceptable because there are a lot of absentee landlords who don't have — some will, of course, but to even be able to find some of these people, to contact them, for them to have an interest, to get a majority of those building owners to invest in this, people are very afraid. The small business owners who have invested for years are afraid that they are going to lose that big benefit to their community.

I want to talk about another concern I have with Bill 149. I've mentioned before that the province is setting the property tax rates on hydro lands, utility rights of way and rail lands, and I'm going to mention again that for the first time ever the province of Ontario is getting into setting these mill rates.

We can't get any information about that either, but from what I understand, it's going to be a uniform tax across the province, which is ridiculous. The idea that you would charge the same amount for a chunk of land, an acre of land, in downtown Toronto as you would an acre in North Bay, for instance, is ridiculous. It doesn't make any sense whatsoever. I believe the government once again doesn't have a clue what it's doing — not a clue. I would ask that they take a second look at that. It doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

Now let me get to education. I see the Speaker is counting here. I hope we have a quorum.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: No, he'd never do that.

Education is an area where the provincial government first of all said they were going to take it right over and they were downloading all of these services on to the municipalities. There was a hue and cry and they had to take some of it back. They decided to only fund half of education.

Then they said they were going to make businesses pay for that half. But businesses still don't have a clue what the mill rate is going to be. They have no information. They know they will be paying. Is there going to be a uniform rate across the province? How much are they going to be paying? They don't know. I know that businesses, mostly small businesses in my area but some of the larger ones as well, are scared to death. They don't know where this is all going to lead.

I want to end in the last couple of minutes and talk about seniors, because I believe this is a very serious issue. We hear over and over again, and in sometimes sanctimonious tones from members of the government, how much they care about seniors. "We're doing this for the seniors. These deferred taxes are going to help the seniors."

I can tell you, as other members have pointed out, I have seniors in my riding who have struggled and worked hard all their lives and managed to scrape together enough to buy a little property. Their kids are doing okay but they certainly haven't become rich and will not become rich. In this day and age, jobs for youth, especially under this government, are hard to come by.

I know these seniors would like very much and have planned all their lives to leave their little bit of hard-won property to their children, to their estate. Some of these people are devastated at the thought that, because they won't be able to afford to pay these taxes, they are going to end up — okay, they can defer them, but you have no idea how important this is to seniors who have not accumulated a lot of wealth over the years but have struggled hard to get what they've got. I think every parent wants to be in a position to be able to leave something to their children, and for a lot of people that is now not going to be a reality.

There are very many flaws with this. When you look at the cumulative effect of these two major bills, plus all of the downloading on to municipalities, it's very clear the government has done no impact studies, does not know where this is going, has no idea and cannot answer our questions. Once again the government, in its zeal to move forward with this, moved too quickly, too fast, without doing the impact studies. They're making changes all right, but they're going to leave a terrible legacy down the road. We won't see it tomorrow, but we'll be seeing it, and I can tell you, it won't be good.

The Speaker: It now being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until half past 6 tonight.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening sitting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 30 September 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 30 septembre 1997

The House met at 1830.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ÉDUCATION

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size / Projet de loi 160, Loi visant à réformer le système scolaire, à protéger le financement des classes, à accroître l'obligation de rendre compte et à apporter d'autres améliorations compatibles avec la politique du gouvernement en matière de qualité de l'éducation, y compris l'amélioration du rendement des élèves et la réglementation de l'effectif des classes.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I don't believe there is a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Clerk, is there a quorum?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Algoma.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I would like to conclude my remarks on Bill 160 by making a couple of observations about the circumstance that we find ourselves in with regard to the possible disruption of education for the students of the province. I think all of us would agree that our children should not be used as political pawns. All of us understand that, yet the Conservative government doesn't seem to understand that or doesn't seem to care. The reactions in question period today from the members of the government party indicate that they don't believe there's anything seriously wrong and that everything's going along just fine with regard to the education of students in Ontario.

I believe, though, that the Harris government is playing a dangerous game and putting our children's education at risk. I believe this government is intentionally attempting to force a confrontation with teachers. The Minister of Education and his colleagues want parents to believe that schools will be better places for the students of the province once the teachers are completely demoralized and powerless.

I can't understand this. I don't understand how any government can believe that the very people who must deliver the education for the students of Ontario can do so if they're completely demoralized and angry at the government that is setting educational policy.

The government continually says that teachers are overpaid and underworked, that they're inefficient, that they have too much time off, and implies that somehow they're not really interested in the welfare of students, in the quality of education for pupils in Ontario. No wonder the teachers are unhappy and angry.

The government continually argues that education funding is much too high in this province, that we're spending far too much on education, that in some ways we're wasting money in the education system, and yet the educational cost per student in Ontario is among the lowest of 63 jurisdictions in North America. Of course, Ontario teachers face some of the most culturally diverse and difficult teaching environments in Canada and they do a tremendous job in that.

The Conservative government has already taken $800 million on an annualized basis out of classroom education in this province despite their commitments during the 1995 election campaign. Many of our school boards can't afford to keep libraries open or fund junior kindergarten or hire special education teachers or carry out counselling programs and special programs for students with special needs. In many cases they can't afford textbooks and crayons or even wood for the workshop, art supplies, and musical instruments for the music program.

The government continues to try to paint teachers as the bad guys in education. With the criticism of teachers and by trying to isolate teachers, the government thinks it will somehow distract the public from the fact that the Conservative government intends to take another $1 billion out of education in the classroom, take another $1 billion from the students of this province.

Parents are going to be faced, I think, with having to pay for textbooks for their kids, paying for their art supplies, paying for their musical instruments, paying for extra tutoring for their children, and I guess they're going to get a tax cut. The tax cut is certainly not going to compensate for the increased expenditures they are going to

have to make for their kids, for their kids' education on a private basis, or for the increased municipal taxes as a result of the download that is justified by the changes in education funding that this government is proposing.

Bill 160 is going to force a confrontation between the teachers and the government. This can only produce a disruption in education for the students of this province. A government that really cares about the quality of education for students would be trying to work things out with the teachers, not forcing a strike.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I think it's important to put on record in response to my colleague from Algoma what the motive is. The motive is very simple; it's higher student achievement. We think we have a good system but that we can make it better, that our students can perform better. I know all of us are concerned when we look at the Canadian test scores and Ontario isn't at the top of the pack. We want Ontario to be at the head of the class.

The member for Algoma mentioned the whole issue of prep time. When we look at our primary school teachers, they're at the national average. When we look at our secondary school teachers, they're 10th out of 10 in terms of the amount of time they spend in the classroom with students.

The Education Improvement Commission, chaired by the former New Democratic Party Minister of Education, Dave Cooke, so spanning all political parties, said in a recent report that there's a direct correlation between student achievement and the amount of time that teachers spend in the classroom. We think that by having teachers spend more time in the classroom, it will lead to higher student achievement. One of the ways we did that is with prep time. Another area is asking secondary school students to spend three weeks longer in the classroom and primary school students an extra two weeks in the classroom, and that's important. We also do that by capping class size.

We look at the expense. In my part of the province, the Carleton Roman Catholic Separate School Board does an excellent job, does even better on some standardized tests, but spends 30% or 40% less than the Ottawa public board does on the other side of the street. So we know from firsthand experience that money is not the sole determinant in how student achievement goes.

I would mention to the member for Algoma that what is concerning a number of teachers in my constituencies is, they phoned up the teacher federation office and they asked when they are going to get to vote on whether they're going on an illegal strike; when is the strike vote going to take place? Do you know what they've been told? They've been told there's going to be no vote, that the union leaders will decide when the strike will be. I think that is very, very unfortunate.

1840

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): I do want to use my two minutes to reflect on the comments that have been made by the member for Algoma, but I cannot resist responding to the member for Nepean.

First of all, 6,000 teachers in Ottawa told you how Ottawa teachers feel about your government's educational policy last night, I say to the member for Nepean. I say to the member for Nepean that the numbers you're using on national average of preparation time are simply wrong. Finally, I say to you that having fewer teachers teaching more classes will not improve student performance; it can only lower it.

I want to go back to the beginning of the comments that the member for Algoma made. I think it was yesterday, or maybe two days ago as we count sessional days around here. He began his comments by saying that this government wants to say that teachers aren't actually upset, that teachers like what this government is doing.

I want to say to the government, to the Minister of Education and to Mike Harris what the member for Algoma said: What world are they living in? What teachers are they talking to? Because the teachers he's talking to and the teachers I'm talking to are demoralized. They are at a breaking point. They feel that for the last two years they have been beaten up, they have been demeaned by their own minister, supposedly, their own Minister of Education, and their work has been devalued by that very minister. This minister does not indicate that he values the work of professional teachers, although, as the member for Algoma said, he uses words as tools and sometimes he may say one thing one day that he says something quite different about the next.

I remember when his friend Mr Paroian did a study that said teachers only work four hours a day. It's no coincidence then that when the minister came out with his background document to Bill 160, he said he wants to take up the contact time between teachers and students to beyond that four hours a day. If that's not confirmation that this minister does not place any value at all on the work that is done and the time that is spent between teachers and students outside the regular classroom, I don't know what more evidence we need. And quite clearly, a minister who is prepared to see non-certified teachers in the classroom does not value the work of professional teachers.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I agree with my colleague from Algoma when he says very clearly and succinctly that this bill is no more and no less than a grab at money that's in the education system. It's a smokescreen that at the end of the day will see $1 billion less being spent on education in this province and it's an attack on teachers.

Some of the most professional, most caring, most committed professionals in this province are being attacked by this government in a way that is unconscionable. I ask myself, and I think all of you need to ask yourselves, who are these people you're attacking? Who are these men and women you think so little of that you would make the kind of scathing remarks you have not just in this bill but building up to this bill over the last two and a half years?

These are the people who take your children and my children into their care for the bigger part of a day and treat them with the kind of respect that you would treat them with yourself. I remember the first day my kids,

particularly my older daughter, arrived at the school that she attended. The kindergarten teacher literally came out on to the road and met us as we opened the van and let her out, and hugged her and brought her in and made her feel so at home that we knew her education was going to be the best it could possibly be.

These are the people you're attacking. You are taking money away from those people in their attempt to do the best job possible for our kids, for your kids and my kids, for the kids of the families who make up this wonderful province we call Ontario.

Our schools can't afford to keep libraries open, fund junior kindergarten, hire special education teachers, student counsellors or social workers, or supply classrooms even the way it is now, and you're going to take more out.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): I am indeed pleased to respond to the comments made by the member for Algoma. He posed some interesting questions in the four minutes that carried over from the last day just a few minutes ago here. He asked who were the bad guys in education and he suggested that we somehow thought it was the teachers. It's far from the teachers.

I say to the member opposite, the bad guys in education are those people who have increased administrative costs while decreasing classroom spending. I suggest to him that boards, when offered the chance to be partners with us in the sort of re-engineering that would guarantee more dollars in the classroom, more commitment to quality education, more commitment to standards and improving the lot of our children and guaranteeing better jobs for them because they'll have greater literacy and greater numeracy skills, instead decided to spend more money on administration.

In particular you have a number of boards, such as the Metro separate school board, whose response coming out of the social contract, which we would all agree was an odious piece of legislation, in the face of requests from the teachers who said, "We want more money," was to sit down and bargain larger class size. That's how they responded. It was a dollars-and-cents issue, at least as far as the board and the teachers were concerned, back in the union negotiations just for this last contract.

The other bad guys, I would submit to you, are the union leaders who are placing ads on the radio stations in Toronto: inflammatory, dishonest advertisements that have made a number of insinuations. They pose the question: "Are the people of Ontario stupid?" Sorry — "Are we stupid?" is the way they phrase their ad. No, they're just plain dishonest.

There has not been $1 billion taken out of education. In fact, education spending in Ontario increased last year at the same time as enrolment declined. And there is no plan to do anything other than bring up the standards of Ontario education to a world-class system whose students get better funding than anywhere else in the world.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The member for Algoma.

Mr Wildman: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Nepean, Fort William, Sault Ste Marie and Scarborough East for their intervention and comments.

I would just say that I agree with the member for Nepean that money is not the main determinant for the quality of education. Good teachers with dedication and high morale are the most important thing for good quality education.

This government, as the member for Fort William has said, has done everything it can to demoralize teachers. We have a terrible situation in the province today because teachers are indeed very demoralized. As she said, 6,000 teachers in Ottawa told the member for Nepean what they think about this government's program and Bill 160.

As the member for Sault Ste Marie said, yes indeed, $1 billion has been taken out of education for Ontario's students and this government continually attacks teachers. In doing that, in taking the money out and attacking teachers, they're attacking students. They don't care about the qualify of education for students.

The member for Scarborough East says the bad guys are the people who decreased classroom spending. Then he must include his own minister, who did indeed take $800 million on an annualized basis out of education for students in this province last year.

Nobody wants an illegal strike. Nobody wants a disruption of education for the students of Ontario. Nobody wants that. If we're going to avoid it, the Premier must intervene and carry out the commitment he made last week to meet with the representatives of the teachers' federation to discuss their concerns, to deal with the issues they're concerned about: the quality of education for Ontario students, their rights to free collective bargaining, and how we can properly fund education in this province. Otherwise, we're going to have a disruption of education for Ontario students.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel): I hope the member for Algoma is right that nobody wants an illegal strike or nobody wants a strike at all with respect to the system. I hope that is the case, although I must say we've heard the Minister of Education and we've heard the Premier say they are prepared to call the union leaders, talk to the union leaders with respect to this whole issue that's being raised with respect to Bill 160. Then I hear almost all of the union leaders — I read this morning, for example, that Frances Gladstone, who is the president of the Toronto Teachers' Federation, said her members are on alert and ready to walk off the job whenever second reading is through.

That's pretty antagonistic language for a group that's trying to mediate this whole issue with the government. I believe the Premier, and I believe Minister Snobelen when he says he's prepared to talk. Nobody wants the teachers to go out. Everybody's going to lose if the teachers of this province go out on an illegal-legal strike, if they leave the classrooms. I'll tell you that the public will lose, the students will lose, the educational system will lose, the government will lose, everyone will lose, no matter what your

political belief is, in his whole exercise, because the government is not going to withdraw Bill 160.

But if the parties are prepared to negotiate, the minister has indicated he's prepared to speak and to hear what the unions have to say.

Interjection.

1850

Mr Tilson: In response to the member for Algoma, both the Premier and the Minister of Education have indicated they've tried to contact the union leaders but they won't call them back.

This whole issue has certainly become most polarized. I could pick up articles at random that speak on both sides of the fence with respect to this issue. There's one from the Hamilton Spectator from September, a piece by Gina Monaco, who says, "Teachers Should Support Educational Change." She says in this column: "Of all the institutions in our society, the educational system and the quality of teaching causes the most controversy, and it should. Our future depends on it being strong and relevant."

Anyone in our society today who says the status quo of education should remain the same should have another look at it.

Mr Wildman: I didn't say that.

Mr Tilson: I'll tell you, that's the impression I'm getting from the opposition, that the status quo should remain. I credit the Minister of Education and the Premier for bringing this bill forward to talk about these very controversial issues. The teachers are certainly annoyed with the whole issue of preparation time and the other issue of certification and these other types of issues. There's no question they're concerned with that.

But I can't believe that when all the members in this place go out into their communities, these issues aren't talked about by members of the public, by the parents of the children who attend our schools and are concerned about professional development days and what goes on in those days and the number of days, and the comparing of our educational system to other systems around this country and in fact the world.

I believe these issues cry out to be dealt with, and I hope the teachers won't simply respond by taking to the streets, because it will not solve the problem. The problem will not go away. It has to be dealt with. It cries out to be dealt with.

I have an article, as I indicated, from Gina Monaco, and she says, "Of all the institutions in our society, the education system should be the most receptive to change."

Mr Wildman: Hear, hear.

Mr Tilson: It isn't, member for Algoma. Members of the opposition and some of the teaching profession — not all the people in the teaching profession — are not prepared to take this position. Many of the teachers in our society acknowledge that there should be change. That isn't want I hear when the member for Algoma — you're right, Madam Speaker, I should be addressing my comments to you. The members of the opposition stand up and say, "Do away with Bill 160, withdraw it," but you're not prepared to talk about how you're going to deal with these issues. You're in opposition and you should be putting forward constructive opposition theories, and you're not.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Tilson: Ms Monaco continues, "It should, at minimum, reflect the current trends in society through a curriculum that is dynamic and evolving. Ideally, our educational system should be on the leading edge of change, not only at the post-secondary level, but at the elementary level, preparing students for the next century. Woefully, it meets none of these criteria." That's what she says.

I know someone could pull a news clipping from some other newspaper that says the opposite, but I believe she's got a lot of merit. If you're honest with us in this place, you'll go back to your constituents and many of your constituents are saying the same thing. That's what the Minister of Education is trying to do with respect to Bill 160, so don't simply dismiss Bill 160. Be prepared to debate some of the issues of preparation time, some of the issues that have been listed in the debates thus far, as opposed to simply saying, "Do away with it."

She continues: "Ontario is an important centre for manufacturing and entrepreneurship in this country and should have an educational system benefiting its stature. Indeed, we have schools where levels of learning lag behind other provinces and other countries, where many kids enter university without the ability to write coherently and where teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic is a lost art. So the Harris government has decided to do something about it, and instead of embracing change, teachers and parents" — and I add members of the opposition — "should listen to them, not resist it."

Mr Wildman: On a point of order, Madam Chair: The member is making such an interesting presentation, I hope there are enough people here to hear him. Could you check if there is a quorum?

The Acting Speaker: Clerk, is there a quorum?

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Dufferin-Peel.

Mr Tilson: Ms Monaco continues: "Interestingly, Snobelen's changes are met with resistance and whining. It seems the teachers should be the first to embrace these changes." I'd like you to listen to these next words. "For years, they have bemoaned their working conditions, large class sizes and irrelevant curriculum, yet these are some of the items that Snobelen is attempting to change."

I haven't heard any discussion on this. If you don't like these things, will you put forward some suggestions to improve the conditions in the classroom, the conditions of teachers, the conditions of our academic system, instead of simply whining and saying, "Withdraw the bill"?

She continues: "Perhaps the changes are too quick, giving teachers little time to prepare. But in the past teachers have complained that 'Nothing ever changes around here' or 'It takes forever to get something changed.' Those are common phrases in institutions that

have become dinosaurean, top-heavy and out of touch. But the world moves quickly, and students must learn to adapt at the same pace."

I quite agree with her, and she has a number of other interesting articles. It's in one of the sets of clippings. I'd recommend that members read her column because she puts forward what I believe is the thrust of why Minister Snobelen is proceeding with respect to this bill.

The system cries out for change simply to keep up in a system that is moving very fast, not only around the province but around the country, around the world. To keep up and to compete with others around this country, this world, we have to provide a good educational system. That's what the minister is trying to do, to improve that system.

There's another column in the September 30 clippings, by Mark Bonokoski.

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): This is impartial.

Mr Tilson: You can say it's impartial, but I think I'm going to read it to you.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Ottawa West, come to order.

Mr Tilson: He says that the teachers say to their critics that if they "spent a day with them in their classrooms, they would immediately change their tune and begin recognizing teachers as overstressed, overworked and underpaid grunts who are sorely misunderstood by the public and, in particular, by the media.

"Theirs are tales of woe. Not enough prep time, too many students per classroom, too many undisciplined charges."

I've heard those types of criticisms, and I think we have an obligation to listen to teachers about some of these concerns. I spoke last week to a young teacher who teaches English, and she showed me the many exams she marks, the many tests she marks, and the time and the hours she puts in. I appreciate that. But we need to sit down and talk about whether, for example, with the issue of preparation time, do librarians or guidance teachers need all the preparation time that's being allotted to them? Do they need that?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Algoma, come to order.

1900

Mr Tilson: Well, if they don't want to hear that, we'll read something else.

"Despite the fact that statistics do not bear out their anxieties, this is none the less the line often given to those who question their motives to entertain a notion of going out on an illegal strike, shutting down every school in Ontario and setting such a fine example for their students."

That's the talk going on. They are saying, "If these issues can't be resolved, we're going to close down all the schools in the province." What a fine example for the students of this province. I don't believe all teachers want that. I believe that many teachers want to solve some of the problems, but not all teachers are prepared to sit with —

Interjections.

Mr Tilson: There's a lot of yapping going on in here, Madam Speaker. I hope you can hear me.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please, from all sides of the House. Come to order.

Mr Tilson: Many people in my riding talk about how there has been downsizing going on, changes in the private sector. In the government there have been changes going on. Why not look at the educational system? Why not look at ways of doing things better? Why not look at the issue of teachers being able to prepare? Why not look at the issues of certification? For example, teachers tell me they've got to go out in the halls and monitor. Why are we paying $50,000 to teachers to go out and monitor halls? There must be other ways of doing that sort of thing.

Mr Wildman: Bring in the cops.

Mr Tilson: You can say, "Bring in the cops," but I don't think that's a constructive way of doing it. I'm simply saying there are better ways of monitoring the halls than using very highly paid and qualified teachers to do that sort of work.

The article continues: "[W]ith all sectors of private and public industry still going through downsizing...re-evaluation of business plans and budget reassessment, there is nary an individual with a paycheque who is not overstressed, overworked and therefore underpaid. Yet teachers don't recognize this."

I understand teachers are stressed. They've got a tough job. That's a really tough job. There aren't too many people who can do that type of work. But everyone is stressed out. The opposition is continually telling us how they're overstressed. I can guarantee you that all walks of our society are overstressed, and we all have to look at that. The teachers think they're alone, and they're not alone.

"They think the small business person has it made, that retail is a licence to print money, that construction workers have jobs coming out their ears, that white-collar employees in the federal and provincial governments can rest easy now that the majority of the cuts have been implemented."

That's the difficulty. We have a polarization of some people who think the teachers have it too soft, and we have some of the teachers who think they are overworked. All of these issues need to be dealt with. I think that this Bill 160 is the appropriate place to deal with that sort of thing, and I would hope that members of the opposition, rather than crying out that the bill be withdrawn, would be prepared to enter into the debate on those very, very important issues as to how to improve the educational system. Mr Bonokoski continues by saying with respect to teachers:

"Perhaps they should walk a day in the shoes of the man who pumps gas for a living, or the masters graduate who waits on tables, or the salesman who has to make a dozen calls a day to keep his job alive, or the shopkeeper forced to stay open for 24 hours to keep the wolves from the door, or the government employee who makes $20,000 less than a grade 3 teacher after 15 years on the job, or the

assembly line worker on the night shift who has two kids in school and therefore barely sees them."

These are the types of conversations we hear in the riding. I certainly have teachers who come to me and tell me that they are concerned with the direction in which Bill 160 is going, concerned, with respect to preparation time, that it's going to cause grief with respect to the preparation of their lessons.

I understand that type of thinking, but I'm saying that if you think we're going to withdraw Bill 160, we're not going to do that.

Interjection.

Mr Tilson: I encourage the opposition, including the member yapping up there, to put forward some sensible alternatives instead of just barking out heckles that mean nothing. You should come forward as a constructive opposition and put forward these types of amendments, and I encourage you to do that.

The minister has spent a great deal of time studying all these issues. A commission has been going around talking about these types of things, and recommendations have come from this commission. We are putting forward most of those recommendations in this bill. We believe the Education Quality Improvement Act will ensure that over two million elementary and secondary school children will spend more time with their teachers in the classroom learning, and that alone is good reason to support this bill.

Preparation time will be officially recognized. It is not now, and we will officially recognize it, but it will be limited to teachers spending more time in the class. The bill will allow the government, for the first time, to limit class sizes. One of the biggest complaints of teachers in this province is the ever-increasing size of classes. This bill will limit class sizes. That is a topic on which I would like to hear some comments from the opposition. Are you saying that we should continue to allow the size of classes to increase? I hope not. I hope you're prepared to put forward suggestions to improve that type of problem we have had, which has been increasing over the last decade. The debate should be about students, not about teachers. That's the problem with respect to the rhetoric that has been coming from the opposition benches.

Today the most important right is of our young students to have an education, and that should be the prime interest of what we are trying to do in this province. I hope the opposition will therefore support us with respect to Bill 160, with respect to the proposals being put forward.

We know that in many ways teachers will be more interested in these changes than anyone else, because their working lives will change considerably.

Mr Wildman: Because they care about students.

Mr Tilson: Well, they say that, but I'm not so certain that some of them are caring about that.

I encourage members, if they are going to direct comments to Bill 160, to provide constructive comments to all these issues being raised as opposed to simply saying, "Let's withdraw the bill," because we're not going to withdraw the bill.

I encourage members of the House to support this bill. It's for the benefit of the students, for the benefit of the education system, for the benefit of our society, and I believe it's a good bill to be supported by all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The real purpose of the bill, and I wish the government would simply spell it out, is to take another $1 billion out of the education system. That's the purpose of the legislation. If the government members would simply be upfront and admit that was the case, I would say at least they're being honest about it. But when I hear you on the other side say you have several other goals — everyone knows you're trying to provoke a confrontation with members of the teaching profession, that you're looking for some target. You have done a full retreat — I understand that — in the face of the public service unions. I could hear the beepers going as the truck backed up. The white flag was waving. The bugle of retreat was being sounded. I understand all that, and I really hope that's what you do on this bill.

If you want to bluster, if you want to make a lot of noise, if you want to attack, I guess we have to tolerate that, but at least I hope that in the end you will be putting your tail between your legs and heading in the opposite direction.

The member asked for solutions. I listened to a member this afternoon who said, "The opposition parties want to spend like drunken sailors." I want to tell my friend the member for Kitchener that I've received several telephone calls from sailors this afternoon, from their wives, from their families, from their neighbours, and they were deeply offended that they would be characterized in this way. I'm sure the member for Kitchener didn't mean to do that. I'm going to tell you, the sailors support the teachers in this province because they understand that those who are on the front line are most cognizant of the needs of the students, and those are the people being attacked in this legislation.

1910

Mr Wildman: I listened very carefully to the member for Dufferin-Peel's presentation. I think it's important to recognize that of the total 20 minutes of his presentation, it took him until the last two minutes to mention students. He went on and on at great length about teachers.

Mr Gary Fox (Prince Edward-Lennox-South Hastings): It was better than you; you never did.

Mr Wildman: My presentation dealt with the quality of education for students throughout.

I really wish that the member for Dufferin-Peel had actually read the bill, because then he might have been able to talk more authoritatively about its contents. The bill is 219 pages. It's very complex and it deals with many, many changes in education, but central to those changes are the effects it's going to have on the ability of teachers to deliver quality education to the students of this province.

The member for Dufferin-Peel said, very sarcastically, something to the effect that some teachers are concerned

about the quality of education for students. The implication was that most teachers aren't, I guess. That's the problem with this government and with the members of the party opposite, that they genuinely appear to believe that teachers don't care about kids, don't care about learning, don't care about the learning environment, don't care about how students achieve in this province. Why on earth would they become teachers unless they cared about those things? Why would they be involved in teaching unless they cared about those things?

Applause.

The Acting Speaker: I have to remind the people in the gallery that our rules are very clear. You are not allowed to applaud, or make any noise whatsoever, as a matter of fact, so I would ask you to please restrain yourselves. Thank you.

Mr Wildman: I understand, Speaker, that I had 20 seconds when you got up to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Your time is up. Further questions or comments?

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): It's interesting that the government members don't even want to respond to that clear call for support for the teachers in our province.

It's really interesting to listen to the member for Dufferin-Peel. I'm going to read a petition I've got here, one that actually was read some time ago. It says:

"The provincial government is jeopardizing the future of Ontario's most precious resource, our children. Our children have a right to a good education, but without sufficient resources the schools cannot give them what they need in order to become healthy, happy and productive adults who will contribute to the quality of life in Ontario.

"Cuts in provincial payments to the school boards mean student-teacher ratios that are unacceptably high, loss of support for students with special needs, outdated science, technology and computer resources, the loss of music, art and outdoor education programs, and school closures.

"It's not too late to undo the damage. Please stop the cuts now."

The date was May 5, 1996, when the $533 million was being ripped out of the system. This Bill 160 is simply another way of taking a big chunk of money out of the system. There's no doubt about it. It's a $1.1-billion further cut being shrouded in deceptive language. The fact is that this bill is going to do a great deal of harm to our students.

Also, the parents in our communities are very strongly supportive of what the teachers and what all of us are fighting for, which is to maintain the standards and fight for the standards for the children. As we speak, right now there is a Prospect Avenue school parents' association meeting in Thunder Bay. They are right behind those of us in the Legislature who are trying to stop this bill and trying to stop the people who are really responsible for this bill, the backroom boys in the Premier's office, John Toogood, Guy Giorno, Tom Long, the guys who sit down and manipulate the process and get what they want to have put forward. It's not even the Minister of Education. It's these backroom boys who are putting this bill together. We've got to support the education system in our province, and we're going to do it here tonight.

Mr Martin: I find it passing strange to hear the member for Dufferin-Peel make the argument that the fact that classroom sizes in this province will not increase or will perhaps decrease is the one good thing in this bill. It's the only thing they're putting out that might be supportable if it were what is going to happen in the end.

This bill is not about increasing or decreasing class size or maintaining it. This bill is not about improving education. This bill is not about students. This bill is about taking money out of the system. This bill is about removing $1 billion from the system, along with the $800 million they've already pulled out, to turn it over to the richest people in the province, who don't need a tax cut, so they can have a little more money to spend on their vacations or to invest in some offshore investments.

This bill is about beating up on teachers. This bill is about beating up on trustees. I was amazed to hear the member for Scarborough West a few minutes ago take a run at the trustees of the province: Ann Vanstone, who's on the implementation committee. Trustees have served in this province over a long number of years in ways some of you will never understand: the hours they put in, the time and energy, the money spent by themselves personally to travel to meetings and make the education system in Ontario the productive and positive system it is for our kids.

It's shameful that the member for Dufferin-Peel comes in here tonight, knowing how damaging this bill is going to be and what this is all about, and pretends for a second that it's about maintaining or decreasing class size.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Dufferin-Peel for his response.

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): Madam Speaker, a point of order: Have there been four two-minute responses?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Perth, in explanation, what has happened is that your party, the government side, missed one of its turns, so it appears to be off a bit.

Okay, member for Dufferin-Peel.

Mr Tilson: I thank the members who have provided some sort of intervention with respect to my comments, particularly the member for Sault Ste Marie; it's unfortunate that the rhetoric continues.

These issues are most important. All of these issues with respect to improving the education system are important. I hope the members take the items in this bill seriously and debate those particular items.

The leaders of the unions have threatened, regrettably, a strike with respect to this bill once second reading takes place — I don't know if it's when second reading starts or when second reading is finished — and I think that's regrettable. As I said at the outset of my comments, the minister has indicated that he's prepared to talk to the unions. He has indicated that he's phoned the unions and that they're not prepared to respond. Hopefully, those negotiations will continue. There's always room to change or modify particular bills. The minister has indicated that.

I hope that a strike will not take place, that debate will continue on this very important topic.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Cochrane North, come to order.

Mr Tilson: We all know that a strike will hurt the very people the teachers are trying to help: the students. I hope they do not go on strike and that they exhaust every remedy with respect to talking to the minister, talking to members of the government and trying to resolve this issue without an impasse.

1920

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): In working on this and drawing up some of the key points I wanted to make, I tried to arrive at a title that would be fitting to the debate this evening. I suggest that our title should be "Education is Our Future." Because Bill 160 is viewed as a numbers bill, a bill which withdraws $1.1 billion from the education system, I thought it would be important for the people across the way, but for all members in the House, to remember a very simple equation: To teach is to touch a life forever. Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that's the essence and the substance which we should be debating this evening.

Obviously, you know because of my background that there's probably a little bit of bias because of my passionate love for students and for the learning process, as well as for the partners in education: the dedicated parents, the hardworking students and the very dedicated and hardworking teachers of this province.

The first message I'd like to get across is the message that a teacher's working conditions are truly the students' learning conditions. I want to look at some of those working conditions that are going to be affected by Bill 160.

The first working condition I'd like to address is the class size issue. Bill 160 pays lip-service to class size. It says it's going to limit class size. It doesn't speak of how it's going to limit class size and it never speaks about protecting class sizes.

As a teacher on leave, I'm most concerned that limiting class sizes isn't the problem. What has to be done is the protection of class sizes. No additional money is allocated through this bill to ensuring that class size is protected. The minister simply talks about limiting class size, but doesn't say how, doesn't say what the numbers are going to be, doesn't say what the implementation strategies are going to be. In fact, he says nothing about truly protecting class size. However, as Mr Tilson alluded to, he wants ideas.

With regard to class size, over a year ago I gave the government an idea, Bill 110. So far, the government has refused to call the bill. Bill 110 protects class sizes and ensures that students will learn in an environment conducive to learning because of the limits it has imposed with regard to numbers in individual classrooms. It doesn't pay lip-service to limiting; it talks about protection. I consider that to be a fundamental difference and certainly an idea that the government would want to explore.

I want to talk a little about preparation time. I believe that "preparation time" is a misnomer. That time, which teachers have negotiated for, if you wanted to try to find out the true essence and flavour of that time, should be called non-teaching time. Teachers use that for a variety of reasons. They correct, they grade and they record marks for students. They make anecdotal records of students and they chart the general path or the general progress of students. That takes an enormous amount of time. No non-teaching time can ever provide the amount of time that's needed, but certainly it's an opportunity for teachers to use some of that non-teaching time to do that.

They use that non-teaching time to ready their classrooms, to ready their labs, to ready the gymnasium for physical education, to ready the shop, to prepare the computer equipment for computer classes and the facilities that are used for students, so when students come in they can maximize the amount of time they have in productive and constructive learning.

Teachers, during their non-teaching time, perform administrative work associated with extracurricular sports, with clubs, with field trips, with band, with involving students in the student council, on the telephone arranging for those intermural games that require busing, that require referees, that require supervision — all the very time-consuming things that the teacher can't do during his or her teaching time because they are, during that time, charged with interacting with the pupils on a one-to-one or one-to-group basis.

They use that non-teaching time for advising and counselling students and for contacting parents. In this different milieu we find ourselves in, not only in our province but in our country, you know that's very time-consuming.

They use that time to meet with parents, to meet with other teachers, to meet with administrators, to meet with consultants, to meet with co-op ed employers in order to arrange out-of-school experiences for the students, to meet with suppliers of materials in the learning process.

They prepare their courses and they prepare their programs and they prepare for their professional reading and for their consulting and for their own individual learning. They do all that in their non-teaching time. Besides that, they assist other teachers, other students, parents and administrators in ensuring that the environment and the area students learn in is a safe and productive one.

That's what teachers really do in their non-teaching time. "Preparation time" is a misnomer. When we were negotiating back in Sudbury, I said that's the wrong term to use because it sends out a negative message. We must always remember — and I hope the members in the House understand that — that non-teaching time is a very important time for teachers to prepare more adequately for their students and to meet and fulfil the needs of their students to a higher degree. That does have a bearing on the results that students will achieve.

Another message that we might want to get across this evening besides the message that education is our future is the message that you can't improve achievement by lowering standards. I want to talk for a few minutes about the

government's suggestion to use non-qualified personnel instead of certified teachers.

First of all, the government members, all the members in the House, must understand that there is more to education and more to the development of a child than the academic learning. One has to be concerned about the social, emotional, mental and physical growth of the child as well as the academic or the subject matter area. These are important and sophisticated areas which require training and an understanding of how a child grows and how a student matures in the learning process. Ladies and gentlemen in the House, that is not an easy task and it only is done after years of professional training, years of professional experience and years of dedication. I suggest to you that we lower the standards when we take away certified from the process.

1930

I think when you move to a non-qualified staff, you lose a little bit in the cross-curricular perspectives when you deliver programs and curriculum and in learning strategies. For those of us who aren't involved in education, we might find that's a little bit difficult to comprehend. But you have to understand that learning is integrated, and as you approach the learning process and as you nurture the child or the student, depending on the age level, it is very, very important to chart and map that progress from a variety of areas. I don't think the use of non-certified teachers will meet the goal that each one of us, as elected officials, should have for the children of Ontario. Very devastatingly, I think there's going to be a decrease in the ability to assess the level of student ability because of the emphasis on integrated learning and the non-qualified person's lack of training in being able to make that assessment.

I don't say that as a condemnation of those people. I say that in fact the other way, that it's very critical for teachers over the long term to become very familiar with the different evaluative tools that he or she must use on a daily basis in an integrated setting. I think independent study components at the senior level will be very affected because of the use of non-certified staff.

I'd like to address for just one second the suggestion that professional development time is a waste of time, as was alluded to earlier. In my several years in teaching, the vast majority of teachers made very valuable use of that time. They do that for two simple reasons: (1) to ensure that their students are better for the teacher's professional development and (2) to ensure that they keep themselves up to date with new strategies, new techniques and new and innovative ways of getting children in Ontario to maximize their potential.

I would suggest to you that wise use of professional development activities is in fact very beneficial to the students of Ontario and I would suggest to you further that the teachers of Ontario expect from themselves and their peers that they will use that time wisely during professional activity days.

The third message that I think is important that we leave with the government is that we cannot allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system. That clearly is the intent that people understand.

I'm not just talking about teachers here. Parents believe that. Students believe that. It is so rare in my 31 years in teaching to have seen what we've seen over the course of the last two weeks, where we've seen students from all over the province decide that they have to take a stand. They don't appreciate it, they don't want to do it, they know it's not allowed, but they believe they have to take that opportunity, that dramatic action to ensure that their Ontario government understands the severity of the cuts.

Let's look at the cuts so far, very briefly: $533 million so far has been cut. That's affected junior kindergarten programs, special education programs, adult education programs, literacy programs. There's been a reduction in staffing at both the elementary and secondary school levels; there's been a reduction in library services; there's been a reduction in transportation services. Ladies and gentlemen, I suggest to you that this affects the quality of learning in Ontario.

Some people may say, "Well, it's the board initiative," or "It's the board's prerogative to cut junior kindergarten." If you don't know, this government, your government, cut $145 million out of junior kindergarten funding or early childhood education funding, so you forced — it wasn't the boards who decided. They were forced, and that's in fact the truth. You can read it in your own literature.

I also wanted to just for a second —

Mr W. Leo Jordan (Lanark-Renfrew): They could have taken it out of administration.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): Oh, come on. Get serious.

The Speaker: Order, members for Lanark-Renfrew and Kingston and The Islands.

Mr Bartolucci: I also want to talk for a little while on the reinvestment strategies, because this is what this bill is all about. This bill is all about withdrawing money from education.

I believe as an individual, as a parent certainly first, as a teacher, that we should be looking at reinvesting money in education, not removing funding from education. If we believe that education is our future, our future is worth investing in. So I believe that this government should listen to the recommendation of the EIC when they suggest that any savings that this government can find should be reinvested in the educational process or in the education system. I would suggest to you that to not accept that recommendation sends a very bad message to the people of Ontario. It tells them, whether it be parent, student or teacher, that you really don't care about education as being the cornerstone to our future.

I think it's very, very important that you understand as well that the teachers of Ontario, the parents of Ontario and the students of Ontario do not want and will not allow our futures to be sacrificed for a tax cut. I think it's very important for you to understand that all the polling that

anybody will ever do, and I don't care which party does it, the people of Ontario want our education system to be enshrined.

Here are some of the options that the member spoke about that they don't hear from the opposition. Let me give you some alternatives.

First of all, I think you should call Bill 110. I think it meets the needs of the teachers, students and parents of Ontario. I believe you should make a profound reinvestment in education. I don't believe you should send out the message that you want to withdraw more money from education. You've already withdrawn too much. I would suggest that, yes, it is very, very important to reinvest in the education system of Ontario.

I think it's critical that you offer an early retirement package with an 85 factor to those older teachers. I believe some of the goals of the government and certainly those goals of the federations can be reached if this government is serious about sitting down and working out a retirement package that is acceptable, suitable and meaningful to the teachers of Ontario.

I believe it's very, very imperative for this government to appreciate the complex job which teaching is and to remember that the teachers' working conditions are the students' learning conditions, and I repeat that, because there's no working condition that wasn't bargained in the interests of the enhancement of student education.

Finally, I think this government should be very, very sensitive to the individual needs of students and disregard the direction towards non-qualified personnel replacing teachers. I believe you send out a message to Ontario, that's one fraught with mistrust about the process we have right now. I think the process is good.

People spoke earlier about wanting change. Teachers, parents and students have been involved in change in education for as long as the education system has existed. They continue to strive with that change and they will continue to strive with that change. They won't agree with it. But I want to tell you, up until this government they were always a part of it. They always felt that they were a part of it and I don't know the reason why they don't feel they're a part of it this time. Maybe it's because of the messages that are sent out always by this government with regard to the communication with teachers, in partnership with them for the good of students.

If time permitted, I would have read "I Am a Teacher," but under the new rules I can't read this. But I would suggest to you that the people on the government side get a copy of "I Am a Teacher" and read it, because what it does is outline the complex roles that teachers have to fill on a daily basis. If you were to do that, I think at the very end of the day, after reading this and after looking at this legislation, you might want to change it, because then I think you would firmly believe that teachers affect eternity. One can never tell where their influence ends.

The teachers of Ontario do not want to go out. There isn't a teacher in Ontario who wants to go out. The teachers of Ontario feel they are being forced out. Only you on the government side can change that perception, because that perception now is reality.

Applause.

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The Speaker: Folks in the galleries, you can't applaud.

Mr Bradley: You don't want them removed, do you?

Interjections.

The Speaker: I don't care. There's just none of that at all, please, or I'll clear the galleries.

Questions and comments?

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I want to compliment my colleague from Sudbury. Every day that he's in here he shows us the compassion and the caring that he brings not only to the people he represents but to all of Ontario. The fact that in this instance he speaks from experience as well as the heart in terms of being a teacher himself should have the government members paying a lot more attention than they did, in my opinion, to what he has to say.

I want to add to his comments by pointing out that the minister who said he needed to create a phoney crisis, the Minister of Education, is here in the House, not paying particular attention to much that's happening around him. I want to say to him very clearly that in my experience of travelling the province on Bill 99, where this government is attacking injured workers, and on Bill 136, where you attempted to pay for your municipal downloading on the backs of public sector workers, I heard one thing loud and clear from teachers all across this province: Minister, this is no phoney crisis. This is the real thing.

You have put the quality of our education on the line in this province. As a result of your direct attack on teachers and the involvement of trustees and the support people who are in those schools, you have put us on the brink, the same brink we were on with 136. Things have not quieted down, things have not gone away; they have merely shifted gears.

The same people in our communities who aren't directly affected but who care about this province and were prepared to back those public sector workers are going to back our teachers and they're going to back our school trustees and they're going to back our communities, because like me, who has a five-year-old daughter heading into school this year, we care about that education system, and you're not going to kill it.

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph): I rise to voice my support for the bill we are debating tonight. I think I can speak with some confidence on this particular issue. I have been a teacher myself, I have been a teacher-librarian, I am the parent of four children in the school system and I have been an involved parent volunteer in my children's school for many, many years. Of course, I can't do that right now with my legislative responsibilities, but I became involved in and have been part of the system for a long time.

It's curious when we stand in this House and talk about the feelings and the messages that come to us from our various constituencies, and we're always interested to

hear what different people think their constituencies are saying to them. I can tell you that in the city of Guelph, which also has the University of Guelph, of course, and I've risen in the House on more than one occasion to say how well it's doing, the subject of education is very, very important to the people of my city. That extends to our elementary and to our public schools as well.

The message I hear loud and clear from my parents, from my taxpayers and from my teachers, many of whom are personal friends, is: Change is needed in the system. With the changes we are bringing out in this bill, with the changes we have already enacted as far as curriculum reform, the standards we are trying to elevate in this province are sorely needed and have been needed for many, many years. The teachers in my riding are telling me that they are very pleased with the changes we are bringing forward. They are good teachers, they are responsible professionals and they are caught in a system that needs change. I am proud our government has the strength to undertake the changes that should have been taken —

The Speaker: Thank you. Statements. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr Michael Brown: I want to congratulate the member for Sudbury on his presentation. I know I've been with Rick Bartolucci as we worked in his constituency and in mine. This is a man who knows about education. He's been there. He's done it. He understands. He understands what it's really all about.

What it's all about is Megan Bagley, Alison Bagley, Paula Brown, Katie Brown, Josh Brown, Jordan Brown, Patrick Stoesser, Elizabth Stoesser and Marianne Stoesser, who just happen to be either my children or my nieces and nephews. That's what this bill is about. It's very personal for me. This has to improve their education. It has to help them achieve their goals in life and to be productive citizens. And every message we get is that they will be casualties of this revolution.

I have teachers in my riding who I know well and know intimately because I've worked with them with my children. They spend countless hours after school with my kids and other kids doing extracurricular activities and helping them, people like Angela Becks, Jim Stringer, Charles Adams, Murray McDonald, Laurie Addison and an endless number of these folks, and it is insulting for a government to spend most of its time kicking sand in their face. That's what is going on today in Ontario, and I don't think, as a parent or grandparent, that we can afford to have this happen in Ontario.

I think the government would do very well to back off, take some time, talk to the people you need to talk to, and let's get on with really improving education in the province.

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): I too want to compliment the member for Sudbury on his comments this evening. He does come to this topic particularly with a fair amount of not just interest but also expertise as a former teacher and principal.

I want to say, and I know the member would agree with me, that the attention that is being paid not just by the public but by members in this House to this bill is a little bit stronger than we see on most bills that go through this place. I want to say to you, I think that's just the beginning. I think before this bill is finished there will be an incredible awareness among the public of Ontario, not just those who are most directly involved in education, our teachers and parents — they are beginning to more and more clearly understand what this government's agenda is all about — but I suspect that before this is over, members of the government will also understand that they will have to make a very clear choice.

That choice will be to either continue to support the Minister of Education and the Premier of the province as they continue in their very clear agenda to take $1 billion out of the school system of this province, which will do nothing to improve the quality of education no matter how strong the rhetoric from the other side — if this was about improving education, we would not have a Minister of Education continuing to talk about taking more money out of the system. We would not have a Minister of Education talking about reducing prep time as opposed to taking some of those resources and putting them back into the classroom.

He's not talking about shifting resources. That's a discussion we could have. We might still disagree, but we could see some logic to that. But what we have here is a discussion and a piece of legislation that has as its object to cut; not to refocus but to cut the resources we now have in the classroom by another $1 billion. That's going to make our system much worse than it is today.

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Mr Bartolucci: I'd like to thank the members for Hamilton Centre, Guelph, Algoma-Manitoulin and Dovercourt for their very kind comments. If I could summarize what I've said and what they've said with just a little quote from this passage, "I Am a Teacher," I would use this one:

"Throughout the course of a day I have been called upon to be an actor, friend, nurse and doctor, coach, finder of lost articles, money lender, taxi driver, psychologist, substitute parent, salesman, politician and a keeper of the faith.

"Despite the maps, charts, formulas, verbs, stories and books, I have really had nothing to teach, for my students really have only themselves to learn, and I know it takes the whole world to tell you who you are."

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it's extremely important that you help tell the students of Ontario who they are. In order to do that, you and we collectively have to ensure that they have the best opportunities for growth.

The direction of Bill 160, the removal of $1.1 billion, is wrong. It is the wrong direction; it is the wrong message. It will give you inferior results. We will be left with an education system that we must rebuild because the principles guiding the reform in education have nothing to do with education but have more to do with a tax break.

I might tell you that education is our future. We, as elected representatives of the people of Ontario, must protect that future. You as a government have a mandate not only to govern; you have a greater mandate to listen to what the parents, students and teachers of Ontario are telling you.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to this bill tonight. I'm going to begin by mentioning that because of the rule changes, I only have 20 minutes tonight to speak to this bill. This is a very important bill, and I —

Mr Jordan: Don't waste it.

Ms Churley: Don't tell me how to use my time. I will remind you time and time again that you have cut down on my ability to speak to important bills in this House, and I want to remind you of that once again.

I, like many people in this room, have had children in the system. Some of you still do. I, like many of you, feel that I have a lot at stake here, that my expertise and my knowledge should be able to, as an opposition member in this House, play a role, and that the government should at least attempt to pretend to be listening to what the opposition has to say. Instead, they get up and they're very arrogant. They tut, tut, shake their heads and do not listen to one word we have to say. There is this general arrogance that they know it all. Well, Speaker, I want to tell you that they don't know it all. Once again, they are not listening to anybody. They are ignoring people, they are moving ahead, and we all know why.

We have always said that change is needed. They like to point out, "The opposition, the Liberals and the NDP, just want to keep the status quo." I'm sure the teachers who are here tonight and who may be watching will recognize that when we were the government there were a few problems from time to time. We had our disagreements with teachers from time to time because we recognized that the status quo was not —

Interjections.

Ms Churley: I'm teasing the bears here.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): No, I liked the problems that you caused.

Ms Churley: I am not even talking about that. The status quo was not acceptable, and we still believe that. I also think firmly that the teachers do not believe the status quo is acceptable.

I can tell you about the teachers in my riding of Riverdale, who are the ones I know best. They work very, very hard. I know about their prep time. I have a very good friend — her name is Leslie — who is a high school teacher. She lives in Riverdale; she actually teaches in Peel. I go to visit her on the weekend. I constantly find her sitting at her computer preparing lessons for her classes during the week. She gets up at 5 or 5:30 in the morning to drive to her school. She spends hour after hour after hour teaching those kids, preparing. She cares. She doesn't have to do that, I suppose. She could go in and not really know what she's talking about and give the kids a second-class kind of education, but like all of the other teachers I know, she cares. That's why she became a teacher.

People don't choose to become teachers just because it's something to do. All of the teachers I know thought about it. They got into teaching because they like kids and they understand how important the education system is. They also understand that education, teaching our kids, is not just about bricks and mortar.

I want to talk to you a bit about the teachers in my riding of Riverdale. Riverdale is an inner-city area. We have schools in Riverdale, as there are all across the GTA area but particularly in the inner city, that deal with kids from all walks of life. We have schools in Riverdale where up to 90% of the children in some of those classes are ESL students. They are students who come from war-torn countries, suffering from trauma; they are students who have special needs; they are students trying to deal with extreme poverty. We have in my riding of Riverdale two adult learning centres where you see, again, people from all walks of life, all ages — new Canadians, elderly people who dropped out, middle-aged people, single moms, all going back to school so that they can do what this government says they'd like them to do: get a good education and then try to get a job.

This government is cutting back in every area that I mentioned. They are going to the lowest common denominator. When they talk about, "It's not fair that the city of Toronto has more money in the system than a northern or another community," I would say that's not fair either. But let's not reduce everybody, including the city of Toronto, to the lowest common denominator, and that is what for sure is going to happen.

The minister talks about special grants for some of this, but when I asked him in the House if he could guarantee that at least the same amount of funding would be available to those schools in the future, he could not guarantee that, and we all know why. This government has had to retreat in so many areas lately. They're having trouble coming up with the money despite the fact that revenues are up, because they said they'd balance the budget, but let's not forget their tax cut. They are now, and this is truly despicable, going to give that tax cut to the richest people in the province — who, by the way, can afford to send their kids to private schools — on the backs of our kids and quality education for them. That is what's happening.

When the minister first went into his new ministry — he came from the business sector — a little video got leaked into the public. We cannot talk about this bill out of context. We all know what's happening here. That's what is so incredible. The minister told the world, inadvertently, that he was going to create a crisis, that they needed to find the money but the system actually is not in that bad a shape; some changes were needed. But no, he says, "If the crisis isn't there, let's go out and create one." Then he starts to create a crisis. We saw it every day. He's badmouthing teachers, then he's badmouthing students, then he's badmouthing school boards, and it goes on and on and on.

Yes, he did create a crisis. He created a crisis that he has no idea about, because the kind of crisis that he created, I feel in my riding. When I go to the schools there, when I talk to the parents — and I have to congratulate and thank the parents of Riverdale, who have been very active in Toronto. They are involved in an organization called Metro Parent Network and some of those parents led the way. They got involved very early on. They've been analysing and keeping track of everything that's been happening, trying to get meetings with the minister and making other parents in the area aware of the implications of these changes.

The government has had to retreat now. They had to give up taking out some of the money they were going to from hospitals. They gave up on the doctors; they didn't take as much money away. They recently had to back down on Bill 136. They're getting worried. I think they deliberately decided that the teachers were an easy target, that they're the ones they're going to pick on, because they have by now created a big enough crisis. The whole plan has been to pit parents against teachers and give the general idea out there that the teachers don't need this prep time. They just sit around drinking coffee. They don't need all that time. All of this pitting school boards against each other and against teachers, and all this stuff; that's what's going on.

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I think the government actually wants this fight with the teachers. They're determined to get the money out and I believe they've been doing polls — I don't know if their polls are showing them anything, but obviously their polls showed them that they couldn't win on Bill 136. Maybe they think they can on this, but I can assure you that I believe the parents are wise to what's going on. When you have a minister who tells the world what he's up to, you can't ignore that. He said, "I'm going to create a crisis," and here we are in the middle of it.

What this government is doing is exploiting the desire of parents, teachers and students to have the best education system possible. That's what we want. We want changes to make that happen. What they're doing, what this is all about is using the language of change and progress as a smokescreen for one of the most regressive moves a government can make, and that is trying to take more money out, $1 billion. And for what? For this tax cut.

The bill is all about centralizing control of Ontario's school system and our children's education in the Ministry of Education and Training. This is very surprising. I, like the minister, am surprised. In fact, I'm shocked. I'm shocked because this is a government that came into power saying they wanted to get out of people's faces and that they believed in local control.

What do they do in education? They take it away. They disband most of the boards; then they start taking over almost everything that boards used to negotiate with the teachers. They've taken away many of the issues that are very important to the way the kids are taught and dealt with in the school. Now the government decides that. It is an incredible step, and I can only think, once again, that it's all about saving money.

Because I just have a short time left, I want to read you something from parents who wrote a long letter, and I believe the minister may have met with these people by now, the Metro Parent Network. They gave a very good analysis, the best they could in a short time, shortly after the meagre information was given out to the public. One of the things in the letter, and I advise the minister to read it, really struck me, because it was my experience as a single mom years ago, on a very low income, that the school which my daughter attended was very important to me and to her, far beyond what she was learning, from junior kindergarten on up.

I'm going to read you this because I think it'll resonate with a lot of people. The heading is, "Schools are integral parts of our communities."

"Our schools are an integral part of our communities. We are concerned that, in an attempt to pare education spending down to the bare bones, too much attention will be paid to the parts and not enough attention will be paid to the whole. Schools are not mere 8:30 am o 4 pm operations. They provide a focus for community activity, with evening and weekend events for students and their families, such as school concerts and plays, athletic competitions, science fairs and author teas. They provide an after school study place for students who do not have space at home to do homework and study. They provide supplementary instruction after school, evenings and weekends and after-four programs, heritage language programs and continuing education classes. They are host to school council meetings, other community meetings and independent groups, such as the boy scouts and girl guides, and they are a major supplier of day care facilities. All these many functions and an overall sense of the place of each school in a respective community must be kept in mind when making decisions which will affect Ontario's school."

I think that's a work of art. I think that paragraph says it all. I believe that besides this government's main objective, which is to find the money, it has lost sight of the role which the school in our community plays in the lives of the students and of the parents. It really is the hub in many communities. The government has lost sight of that. We know fundamentally that if this bill is passed, we're going to lose most of that.

I see some members shake their head, and I strongly advise them to read the bill and look at other analyses besides the minister's, because he's wrong about this. This is very, very serious. This is a terrible legacy that you will be leaving to our kids in this province. It seems to me that most of the members are not aware of the implications of this bill.

I strongly advise you to find out more about it, because if these things are eliminated — and I recall back many years ago, I guess one of the things that led me into politics — because I never dreamed I would be — was that I was a single mother, and I needed child care in my community. There wasn't any; so what's changed? I noticed at

Withrow school, where my daughter attended junior kindergarten, that there were all these empty rooms, and I remember going to the principal and saying: "We need a day care centre. Why can't we use one of these rooms?"

We started negotiating with the boards. This was a fairly new concept at the time, and it took a couple of years, maybe three years. I would not give up. It took several years, and by the time we got the day care at Withrow school, I didn't need it any more. But I was very happy to see that it was there for other children. In fact, at Withrow school, there are two day care programs now. Interestingly enough, my grandchild just started going — the circle is being completed here — to Withrow school in junior kindergarten. He's not in the day care there because of the waiting list, so he has to be shipped to junior kindergarten and then back to the day care, because it's part-time.

Since that time, there are day cares right throughout our school system. There are waiting lists now, as we know, all over the Metro area — for children all over Ontario, but I'm speaking more specifically about my own area tonight — and if those day cares in those schools are to be closed and not funded, and if we can't have new day cares within schools, then we're going to have a fairly major crisis. I would certainly hope, again, that the members here tonight who are concerned about that speak to the minister about it. Look at what the bill says. If you're not happy with it, then you have the opportunity to make some changes.

I would say to the members of the opposition that this bill — not to suggest for a moment that most of the bills which have gone through this place have not had a rather profound effect on certain segments in our society; they have — but I want to say to the members that, if you don't pay attention to this bill and if you only listen to what the minister and his notes are telling you, you've got a problem.

The member for Guelph said, and other members say: "Hey, I'm talking to the teachers in my riding. They like this." Well, I find that kind of strange because I don't know any teachers who like this. There might be few out there, but the majority of teachers don't like it. Why should they? It's not just about their careers; it's not just about their prep time. They care about the kids. That's part of what they do. They're trying to tell the government something: They do not want to go out on strike.

May I say to the minister and the government members, when you try to hold it up that this is just the big union bosses, it's not the run-of-the-mill teacher, the ordinary teacher, these ordinary teachers are the people who vote the heads of their unions in, just like we're elected by our constituents. We come here to represent them. The teachers can turf out their representatives — just like we can be — if they don't like them. My understanding, from talking to teachers in my riding and around the province, is that they don't like this bill for a lot of reasons. They want to be part of the process. They've been left out of the process. They have some good ideas. They have said that they agree that the status quo is not acceptable. Times have changed; we're in a different era. We have all kinds of different problems in our society to deal with. It makes sense to look at ways to save money. Nobody is denying that.

This is an opportunity for the government to say to the teachers, for the backbenchers to rise up on this one — I would like to see it happen, for you to pick this one and say, "This one is about our kids; it's going to affect our kids." I'm sorry that the member for Guelph finds that funny. I'm sorry that I cannot somehow convey to the members that this indeed is a very serious matter.

I would say to the government tonight to withdraw this bill, withdraw it completely. Start all over again. Talk to the parents, talk to the children, and yes, speak to the teachers, because if anybody has experience in this area, they know what the problems are, they know where the money can be saved and they know, most of all, what our children need. You have an opportunity tonight to not just mouth the words you've been given in your briefing notes but to stand up for the kids in your communities and the kids of this province.

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The Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): The member for Riverdale says it's time for the backbenchers to stand up. All right, I'll stand up, and I'll tell her I am speaking on behalf of our children and our grandchildren. This is not about saving money. The teachers don't want to go on strike? Good. I'm glad to hear it, because we don't want them to go on strike either. Did they vote to go on strike? No, they didn't vote to go on strike. It will be an illegal strike.

Interruption.

The Speaker: Sir, please leave; just leave. Sir, if you don't leave I'm going to clear the gallery.

Reset the clock.

Mr Wettlaufer: The accusations I have heard by the teachers' union leaders and by members of the opposition constantly in this House and outside of the House that the Minister of Education is lambasting teachers, is demoralizing teachers — that is a crock. I have spent weeks going through Hansard, and I have not found one instance, not one, of the minister lambasting teachers; not one. Repeatedly, in Hansard, the minister has said, "We have the best teachers in Canada; we have the best teachers in North America; we have the best teachers in the world." I echo that. He said it again yesterday, that we have the best teachers in the world.

The member for Riverdale said that the teachers realize that reform of the education system is necessary. That is what this bill is all about. The teachers recognize it and so did the former NDP minister, the member for Windsor-Riverside. David Cooke recognized that. I recognize that and our government recognizes that. That's what this bill is all about: reform. It's for the betterment of our students, and I hope the teachers and we can sit down and work this out together.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I want to compliment the member for Riverdale. She speaks with her usual passion and experience and does her homework.

To the member for Kitchener, I would say that if it's not a money bill, I don't know what it is. It's certainly not a bill that adds any educational programs. As a matter of fact, I haven't seen one bill that added anything, other than a small computer program for more computers — not one thing. They've taken away learning programs for kids; kids with special needs; adult education; junior kindergarten, even though all the research says that the earlier you can provide an opportunity for children to learn about the educational environment and deal with their biological development, the better opportunity you have to help them be a wholesome, healthy youngster as it goes on.

The other night I saw the minister on CBC news. He was asked by Suhana Meharchand, the anchorwoman, "I hear you're expected to take $1 billion out of education." This minister is not stupid. He's very sly, he's very slippery, and I think he's unwise, but he's not stupid. His answer was: "We're starting over. We're going to build the best educational system you could ever see, step by step by step. We're going to have equality for all the kids throughout Ontario. We'll have the best program; we'll fund it adequately." It's step by step all right; he's building a staircase right to the cellar. Just as this province is the worst supporter of post-secondary college and university students in all of Canada, we are now headed in exactly the same direction for high school and elementary. Isn't that something to be proud of?

If he isn't after extra money, why doesn't he come out and say so? Why you don't come out and say, "I will not take any money out" or "any changes will go back into the classroom"?

Mr Martin: I want to go on the record tonight as supporting the comments of the member for Riverdale and comment on one piece of her presentation, the fact that people are beginning to see what this government is about, are beginning to recognize the very hurtful initiatives they're introducing and, in this instance, the education bill, are beginning to respond.

I met in my office last Friday with a group of students from the high schools of Sault Ste Marie who talked to me about this bill, talked to me about the effect it will on them and the environment in which they have to learn. I was very impressed with their understanding and the sincerity with which they did that.

I want to share with the House, in the couple of minutes I have, a few of the letters I'm now beginning to receive into my office from people in my community about this bill. Here's one from a Ms Wilkinson:

"Dear Mr Martin,

"As an educator with 30 years of teaching experience and dedicated service to my profession, I must ask you to represent the students and teachers of Ontario. This government has an agenda that is dangerous to education in this province. It is also uninformed, insulting and immoral."

Here's another letter from a Bonnie Yurick in Sault Ste Marie, to Mr Snobelen, if he wants to listen for a second:

"I am writing concerning your new Education Act. I am concerned because with this new Education Act, our children's education is at risk. What you are presenting to the media and what you are actually planning are two different agendas.

"You have constantly refused to talk to educators to find out the 'real concerns' or what the schools are really about. It's a sad commentary when the Minister of Education is so little informed or educated that he feels destroying the educational system is a justified whim."

I have other letters and I will read them at another time.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): If any government ever in this province took money out of the system, it was the New Democratic government through the social contract. You can talk to any of the teachers in our province and they understand exactly what happened with the social contract.

The thing I can't understand — first of all, the opposition parties are doing their normal thing, which is playing the role of opposition, and I understand that. What I don't understand is why you think we have any opinion of our professional teachers in this province other than that. That's what they are. They are excellent professional teachers. There is nothing in this bill that criticizes our teachers.

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But there is something that I find very interesting in this whole debate. The member for Riverdale spoke as a mother and a grandmother; I can do the same thing. I can speak as a mother and a grandmother whose children went all through their education in public schools in this province. How interesting that they went through two additional years of education in this province compared to every other child in the other provinces across Canada. I've never been able to understand the difference between children in Ontario and children in other provinces, which for many years never had kindergarten, never mind junior kindergarten, and still don't have grade 13.

I happen to have employed in my office here at Queen's Park two graduates from the school system in British Columbia, equally as bright and well educated as any student graduating in Ontario. They went to school for two years less.

If you really believe in your argument about more time spent with the teachers at an early age, that's exactly what we are saying, more time —

The Speaker: The member's time has expired. Response, member for Riverdale?

Ms Churley: Thanks to all the members who responded to my speech.

I believe the member for Kitchener misunderstood my meaning of standing up. That wasn't quite what I had in mind, but that's fine, I got his point: He doesn't agree with me.

The member for Ottawa Centre, on the issue of the money, I agree that we have given the Minister of Education every opportunity to say he won't take out that

$1 billion or whatever. We don't want any more taken out. A whole bunch has been taken out. He won't give us that assurance. If the backbenchers can do anything to help with that, we'd all feel a certain level of comfort.

To the member for Sault Ste Marie, the letters he read out from his community reflect a lot of the same kinds of things I'm hearing from teachers in my community.

To the member for Mississauga South, first of all I'd ask her to please try not to be so patronizing. Everything I said tonight was put in the context that "Oh, that's the opposition over there just doing their opposition thing." She's been in opposition before, and if anybody should understand — I watched her impassioned speeches at times when she was on this side of the House when she cared about certain issues. I remember one in particular. We do not just stand here all the time and oppose for the sake of opposition. What I said tonight I feel very strongly about, and I believe my concerns are shared by thousands and thousands of teachers across the province. It's not just me talking. That's the important point you have to get tonight. I know you're not going to listen to me. Your comments made that very clear. That's part of the problem here, isn't it, that we're seen as simply opposition. But at least listen to the teachers, the students and parents.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton): It certainly is a pleasure for me to stand in the House tonight to speak on Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act. This bill ensures that our students will have access to higher-quality education in the province of Ontario and it will be provided in a cost-effective manner. I don't think anyone would have any difficulty in buying that message.

Some of the debate tonight has been quite heated, quite emotional. I understand that change is difficult to swallow at times, difficult to accept. However, as some of the members have pointed out, the concerns are not about the teachers. The concern is with the process and the system.

There's an article in today's Toronto Sun headlined, "Teachers, Walk a Mile in our Shoes." The last part of the article states:

"It is empty rhetoric and therefore deceitful. But, as teachers often say when critical of the press, why let the facts stand in the way of a good story?

"As a sidebar to all this, it might be quite different if our children were receiving the education they deserve and that bang for the buck was worth every penny.

"But they're not, and it isn't.

"The cost to the taxpayer in Ontario, per student, is the highest in the world yet the standard of education is far from the top."

Interruption.

The Speaker: Order. I'm telling you, if another person in the gallery breaks in, I'm clearing the gallery. Understand that in the gallery. The next person who interrupts, the gallery is being cleared. The opposition members should come to order as well.

Mr Beaubien: I'm sorry that some of our dedicated teachers in the gallery tonight are upset. I did not write this. This is the observation of Mark Bonokoski.

Interruption.

The Speaker: Clear the galleries. Stop the clock, please.

Member for Lambton?

Mr Beaubien: I'm sorry for the disruption. I was just quoting from a writer. However, I'll finish the article.

"This is not rhetoric. This is fact.... If there is a Fat City, it's within the education community. If it were a private enterprise, it would have gone belly-up long ago, and justifiably so.

"Our teachers have been so spoiled over the years that they cannot see the reality for the trees. They feel hard done by. But it's a crock."

I have an awful lot of respect for the teachers. Most of them, the large majority, are very dedicated, very knowledgeable and hardworking. However, as I pointed out earlier in my speech, change is sometimes difficult to accept.

I want to take you back to 1995, when we campaigned in the last election. We spoke about education, and we spoke in this manner:

"Classroom funding for education will be guaranteed.

"That does not mean than savings cannot be found elsewhere in the education system. Too much money is now being spent on consultants, bureaucracy and administration. Not enough is being invested in students directly.

"Our principle of 'classroom-based budgeting' will help ensure that this essential service is protected and, indeed, that excellence in education and training is enhanced."

Nowhere do we talk about teachers. We talk about the system.

This bill we're talking about here tonight, Bill 160, will promote a high-quality education system by limiting class sizes. This bill would, for the first time in the province of Ontario, prevent school boards from increasing class sizes.

At the present time, school boards and unions can make an agreement that increases class sizes. That is no longer acceptable. I cite a board in the region of Halton, whereby after the social contract, that particular board negotiated a 5% wage increase with the teachers. However, the PTR was increased and that was negotiated between the board and the teachers. Is that fair to the students? It is certainly not fair to the students. However, certainly in my riding, I still hear teachers' concerns about the PTR ratio, and rightfully so. They should be concerned about it. But this government is finally going to do something about it. We are going to address that problem.

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Another thing the bill will do is to focus teachers' expertise in the classroom. The more time teachers spend with students, the better students perform. I'm not an expert on education like the member for Sudbury but I am sure he would agree with that statement. High school teachers in Ontario currently spend as much as 20% less time than teachers in other jurisdictions. Is that fair to our students? I think the answer is very evident: It certainly is not.

According to the Education Improvement Commission high school teachers in Ontario, on average, spend 3.75 hours of their working day teaching students compared to the national average of 4.5 hours per day. If we ask teachers to spend a little bit more time in the classroom, I don't think that's going overboard.

Let me give you a couple of examples of what happened in my constituency today. I received two calls. One was a parent complaining that a teacher was on the PA system announcing to the students that there would be a strike, that this strike would last three weeks and that the government would cave in, or if the government did not cave in, they would be legislated back to work.

Where did this come from? Where is that in Bill 160? Can anyone on the other side of the room tell me this is in 160? That's fearmongering.

Let me tell you about another one. This is a high school in my riding. Today they decided they would jam the fax in yours truly's constituency: 400 faxes of the same sheet. I don't mind receiving faxes. I would gladly pick them up at the high school and I would gladly sit down with the students and the teachers to discuss Bill 160. However, someone decided it would be cute and fuzzy to send 400 faxes to our office today. Think about the cost involved in this. How many hours could we provide for child care or junior kindergarten or maybe a football uniform as opposed to spending time and material sending useless faxes?

This bill would allow the province to set standards for the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom, as I said. Certainly the bill would also provide more time for learning. The average number of classroom instructional days in Ontario is 185 days for elementary grades and 170 days for secondary grades, compared to more than 200 days in Switzerland and 192 and 191 days in England and Scotland respectively.

Let me tell you that I have a little bit of experience with regard to school days in Switzerland because I happen to have a daughter who spent six months in their school system. Not only do they go on Fridays, sometimes they end up going on Saturday mornings. Their school day started at 8 o'clock in the morning and it ended at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. There is no doubt she was surprised at the length of time they spent in school, but if we look at the performance of students in Switzerland, I think they fare quite well.

The Education Improvement Commission has recommended that the school year for elementary students be increased by two weeks and for secondary school students by three weeks.

As I pointed out, students in other jurisdictions have a longer school year, have longer hours, and I'm sure that is a palatable suggestion.

Students should have access to specialists.

In many jurisdictions, professionals work with teachers in the school. I remember in my days as a general insurance broker spending probably six to eight hours every school year at the high school talking about insurance. I didn't get paid for it, but I thought it was important to teach young people who will buy insurance in the near future as to the dos and don'ts and the whys and the why nots and why your insurance sometimes is sky-high. I think they deserve an explanation. You can't expect teachers to know everything about insurance. However, I think the system made access to professionals in that field.

What about a football coach? If we don't have a person who can coach in the high school, what's wrong with taking a former pro or a former junior player? What's wrong with that?

Also, the bill would provide a greater role for parents through advisory school councils.

An advisory school council would be established in every school to increase opportunities for parents and the community to become involved in the education of their children. It is really difficult to speak against that. I'm sure most of us in this House have had the experience of having kids go through the system at one level or another, at one time or another. The council would also advise the principal on matters such as student discipline, student safety and local priorities.

I think if you talk to teachers today, one of the major concerns they have is the difficulty they have in handling the classes. It's about time we had parents taking more of an important and active role in the education of their students. You're going to say, They're doing that now. Well, I say to you they could do a better job, and I think we're going to encourage people to do that.

Another one I would like to speak on tonight is a simpler, fairer funding system. The province, not the school boards, would be responsible for setting all education property tax rates. Taxes will stay in the community where they are raised.

I look at the situation in my own riding where some municipalities do not have a high industrial assessment base and compare them to other municipalities which may have a high agricultural assessment base. Why should a student in one part of my riding not be able to receive the same quality education as someone somewhere else in the province or sometimes even in the riding or close to the riding?

I think it's about time the funding followed the students so that every student in Ontario receives the same level of funding. Granted, there will have to be some adjustment because there are some unique situations in different parts of the province.

A more effective and fair funding system would focus resources on the classroom and fund all students according to their needs. Students would have access to the same high-quality education regardless of where they live.

If we look at taxes — we've heard about taxes tonight — many municipalities in Ontario in the past 10 or 12 years, and I'm talking about the municipal levy, have not raised their municipal tax levy. However, when we look at the county or the regional or the school levy, there have been some tremendous increases, especially with the school board assessments. I think that by having a fair funding formula we will eliminate those peaks and valleys.

Education would require a review of the funding system to ensure standards of fairness are being met.

Another point I would like to talk about tonight is recognizing the needs of growing communities. We have changing demographics in Ontario. In my area at the present time young people are leaving the area because the employment situation is not very rosy. For instance, the Lambton public school board last year lost 600 students. Of course we're going to lose teachers in the region. However, there are regions in the province where the opposite applies, and I think we have to be able to cater to this in an effective, cost-effective manner. When we look at new schools with a whole number of portables, it's not the most suitable situation to have 15 to 20 classes and then have 10 or 12 portables.

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One situation I would like to talk about tonight — I'd like to refer to an organization in my riding, the Otter Swim Club. I'd like to refer to their instructor, their coach, Rema Abdhu. Rema was an Olympian in the 1988 Olympics in Los Angeles. My two daughters swam competitively during the early 1990s, and I remember that they had a banner in the pool for the 1992 Olympics in Spain. The banner stated, "No pain, no gain, no Spain." Those kids realized that if there was no pain there would be no gain so that you could get to Spain. They had a goal, they had a vision.

When this government was elected, we had a goal, we had a vision. Who said there would be no pain? Nobody said that. There has to be pain in order to have some gain so that at the end of the day we can all benefit from sensible economic policies that relate to education, health care and other situations.

The exercise we are going through right now is not easy and it is painful in some cases, but it's worth it. If we look at what's happened in Alberta and what's happening in Ottawa, but especially Alberta, they have a nice problem. They have $1-billion surplus, and they're waiting to get some input from their constituents as to where they want to spend that money. I think the same can be duplicated in the province of Ontario, as opposed to having the legacy that was left by the previous governments, including Conservative governments.

At the end of this fiscal year, we will have a debt of $108.5 billion. I look at the NDP. They're always talking about the little guy, caring for the students and the little guy. They spent $1 billion a month more than they took in for every month they were in power. That's $33 million per day and $1.25 million per hour more, every hour you were in power. What kind of legacy is that, that you left to the young people of this province?

Don't tell me that you care about kids. Sometimes I wonder whether you've got blood running in your veins. Sometimes I think you've got ethylene glycol. It's nice to say you care about the kids, but you had a short-term vision, and look at the long-term plan you left.

Let me tell you in closing that we all took a role in getting into this mess we're in today, and we all have to take a role in getting out of the mess we're in today.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Cullen: I rise in response to the remarks made by the member for Lambton. The member for Lambton and the member for Dufferin-Peel both referred to an article written by a certain Mark Bonokoski that appeared in the Toronto Sun. Mark Bonokoski happens to be an editor with the Ottawa Sun. Of course we all accept that editors are founts of wisdom.

During the recent by-election in Ottawa West — remember that by-election that was just held over the summer? I know not too many of you were paying attention, but we did have one in Ottawa West and Oriole and Windsor-Riverside. During that by-election, all the candidates were called to CFRA, where Mark Bonokoski has a radio show called Off the Record. Of course it was on the record; it was very public. We were assembled around the table, and in my opening remarks I happened to mention that I believe the PC government led by Mike Harris is really a Reform Party in PC blue clothing. Mark Bonokoski's rejoinder was, "I wish."

In the course of the debate we talked about education and education costs. Just to show you his grasp of these educational issues, which of course the members opposite cling to as the fount of wisdom, we happened to speak about the Ottawa Board of Education per pupil cost, which is slightly over $8,000 a pupil; the provincial average was just about $6,000. In the course of the discussion I said: "All right, folks, tell me how much of this $8,000 goes to administration. Just tell me." There was utter silence. Not Mr Bonokoski, not the Conservative candidate, a certain Chris Thompson, could understand that only $800 of that $8,000 went to administration.

You tell me that there's so much money to cut from fat within education. I can tell you, after the two years of this Harris government, after so much money being cut, after school boards having to sweat over the kinds of programs they can deliver for their students, they don't have any more money to cut. You want to take another $1 billion out? Shame on you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Are you guys done over there? Many thanks. Further questions and comments?

Mr Silipo: I listened with more than passing interest to the comments of the member for Lambton. I have to say that I found a couple of contradictions, but I was struck by how strongly he seems to believe that what this bill will do and what his Minister of Education's intent is is to live up to the guarantee provided in the Common Sense Revolution that classroom spending will be guaranteed; that what's going to happen through this bill, when the minister talks about capping class size, is that class size won't get any bigger; and that focusing teacher attention in the classroom by reducing prep time is what he wants to do.

Those are all laudable goals. I just find it really striking that that's what a member of the government caucus believes, because obviously he's not looking at the same bill I am. I want to say to him and to all members opposite that one of the things that will come about as a result of this bill passing is that you will actually have to finally take

responsibility for the funding decisions made in our school system, because one of the things that flows from taking complete control of the funding formula is that when class size then goes up, when classroom spending is reduced, you'll no longer be able to hide behind the school boards. You will have gutted the powers of the school boards and we'll only have the minister and the government to blame for the deterioration of our school system.

If this was about refocusing the resources, if this was about refocusing the spending within education, we could have a discussion about that at a more serious level, but this is about taking money out of the system. You can't convince me or anybody else that it's not about that.

Mr Baird: I'd like to congratulate the member for Lambton on some excellent, well-researched remarks. He pointed out, when talking about spending on education — some of the members across laughed, but we have a very good example in Ottawa-Carleton. On one side of the street they spend the second-highest amount of any board in the province. On the other side of Baseline Road, they spend almost 40% less, at the Carleton Roman Catholic school board. You'd expect to see the results to be, the way some members talk, 40% less. The member for Lambton will be interested to know that the results in many of the indicators are actually better. Retention rate is among the highest in the province. Some might say, "Well, the Carleton Roman Catholic school board is a small board," but they are the fourth-largest Roman Catholic board in the province. Their retention rates are high and on standardized testing they do extremely well, and they do it by spending 30% or 40% less.

It's funny that the only areas where there are extraordinary needs for costs just happen to be the areas where there's a rich property tax assessment base. I would agree with the member for Lambton that the best way to fund an education system isn't necessarily based on the value of the properties around the schools in that education system.

The goal of increasing student achievement is an extremely important one. I can tell the member for Lambton, my constituents feel very strongly that reducing the number of PD days will be good; having students in the secondary level spend three more weeks in the school system will be a good thing; two more weeks for primary school students will be a good thing. We all know from the Education Improvement Commission's report that when teachers spend more time with the children in the class, they get better results. That's not John Baird or John Snobelen or Mike Harris saying that; Dave Cooke, the former NDP Minister of Education, has said that. That's obviously good news, because we have a good system in the province of Ontario. But I think we can make it better.

Through Bill 160, we can build on the strengths of that system and get better student performance. That's the bottom line. I would certainly agree with the member for Lambton in that respect.

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Mrs McLeod: The member for Lambton began his remarks by saying that the problem wasn't with teachers, the problem is with the system. I think he was following on the indignation of the member for London South saying that there's nothing the Minister of Education has ever said which is demeaning of teachers. I would suggest to the members that they read Bill 160. The entire bill is a teacher-bashing bill. When the Minister of Education says that all the time that teachers spend outside the classroom —

Mr Wettlaufer: You are obviously a product of the Ontario English system.

The Speaker: Member for Kitchener, come to order, please. Thank you. I don't want to warn you again.

Mrs McLeod: Mr Speaker, it was the member for Kitchener who got quite indignant before. I will apologize to the member for London South.

I say again to all of them that when the Minister of Education wants to take away teacher preparation time on the grounds that any time spent outside the classroom, even when it is with students, is a waste of time, he is demeaning the work of teachers.

When the Minister of Education says, as he says in this bill, that non-certified teachers, untrained individuals, can replace professional teachers in the classroom, he is very clearly demeaning the work teachers do.

When the Minister of Education says, as he did on Monday, that Ontario is the caboose at the end of the education train, he is demeaning the work of teachers.

He is calling our students failures. The member for Sudbury said, "We have to tell our students what they are." This Minister of Education wants to tell our students that they are failures. How does he reconcile his need to prove that the system is broken with the fact that the Durham board won an international award for excellence? How does he reconcile it with the story that's in today's Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal that the Red Lake school up in northern Ontario was recognized by the Reader's Digest international contest as the outstanding leader in education?

No, I say to the member for Nepean, it wasn't because they are a rich board, not the little Red Lake board. It's very clearly because of the teachers, because of the quality of teaching. The system is not broken. Everything the Minister of Education says to persuade people that it's broken and needs to be changed is demeaning to the work and the success of Ontario teachers.

The Speaker: Response.

Mr Beaubien: I appreciate hearing the comments from the members for Ottawa West, Dovercourt, Nepean and certainly the last member who spoke, Fort William.

With regard to comments from the member for Ottawa West, I'm not qualified to comment on the cost of administration in your jurisdiction. However, upon hearing some of the comments from the member for Nepean, I would suggest you check your figures.

Member for Dovercourt, yes, this bill's about limiting class sizes. You mentioned gutting the power of the school boards. I look in my own constituency, about the only one I can really quote on, and I think it's about time we amalgamated the boards between Lambton and Kent. I think it can be effective; they're certainly going to be more cost-

effective. Sometimes I wonder about the amount of money we spend in administration. A lot of teachers wonder about the amount of money, why we have so many superintendents and so many of this and so many of that. It's about time. If you consider that or classify that as taking money out of the system, I don't have a quarrel with you on that particular point

With regard to the comments of the member for Fort William that this bill is a teacher-bashing bill, that's exactly what is wrong. I know your role as opposition members is that you have to get the press and you have to get in front of the cameras and you have to get that one quick quote. "Teacher-bashing bill" sounds very good in the Fort William press. However, are you doing justice to your constituents? I don't think so.

The reason I say that is that I just finished a talk show tonight before I came in the House. When I hear people saying, "You're going to take teachers' rights and you're going to do this and you're going to do that" — people are so misinformed because of the information you're feeding out to the press back home. People are very confused.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I'm delighted to rise this evening and speak about Bill 160, the so-called Education Quality Improvement Act. It really is with a heavy heart. There's no fooling the people of Ontario, I say to all the members, what the true intent of this bill is about. This bill is about taking $1 billion away from our kids, about a reduction to their education, about neutering teachers and showing who's in control. Education is not a matter of "I'm in charge." You will say it's a matter that together we're working to educate children, but that's something this government has not shown any commitment to.

There have been a lot of comments this evening by their members. The previous speaker talked about wanting to get some advice and some knowledge. I suggest he speak to the member for Mississauga South, a former trustee herself. He could speak to his Premier, a former president of the Northern Ontario School Trustees' Association. He could speak to the Minister of Labour or the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. He could speak to all these members in his own caucus who have some experience with school boards.

If he is saying that these are the individuals who've created a mess — those are his own words — I would say that those individuals would take great exception to those comments because they are just not factual. I would submit that it is a campaign of misinformation on behalf of this government, on behalf of this minister particularly, to implement certain changes he feels that are necessary to take $1 billion out of education to meet targets, to fund a tax cut. This is why he is doing it.

This is not the first time that our Minister of Education, John Snobelen, has raided our classrooms. He stole $533 million out of our classrooms already. He's admitted that it has reached the classrooms, that it has affected the quality of education. That is shameful.

His actions to date — let's review them. He has made junior kindergarten non-mandatory; 24 boards of education in the province dropped junior kindergarten because he downgraded it, because he took it from a class 1 grant to class 3 grant, essentially from full funding to 10% of the funding. He wants to say, "I didn't do it; I didn't cut junior kindergarten." He most certainly did, and he and this government must stand accountable for those actions.

If you read the report of the royal commission on education — in fact, the gentleman who asked for that report and who helped to frame it is now one of his education experts on the Education Improvement Commission; that's Dave Cooke, along with Ann Vanstone, former chair of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board. I would say to the members opposite, if education has been run so badly, why has the minister appointed these two individuals as his lead advisers and experts in education? Why? It's absolute nonsense. It is just not the reality of the situation today. I would use much stronger language, except that the Speaker wouldn't let me do that.

This bill is about power. This bill is all about who controls education. I would refer you to the words of former trustee Mike Harris, who said that he shudders to think what would happen under provincial control of education, that he knows it's a recipe for disaster for education and for kids in this province. That was when he was president of the Northern Ontario School Trustees' Association, and it is true today as well.

Under this provision of Bill 160, John Snobelen and Mike Harris will have unprecedented powers over education. They will be able to hire and fire teachers. They will be able — they have given themselves the power — to remove the right to strike for teachers. In section 58 — now, they've clouded the issue; they've put it under a different section of the bill, but if you look at the words of Justice Archie Campbell when he was reviewing Bill 104, he said that the government used extraordinary powers, order-in-council powers, in an inappropriate way; that this government has a track record of using provisions in other pieces of legislation in extraordinary ways to achieve their ends. It is no different and it is not by accident that the Minister of Education has included this clause. It allows cabinet to make regulations to prevent the disruption of education of pupils. What that means is that the cabinet can now remove the right to strike from teachers. It is beyond belief that anyone would feel that this minister has any credibility.

2100

I should tell you, by the way, that this particular Minister of Education is the only one in the history of the province who has twice had to retract his words in this House when he made claims that were refuted by physical evidence. Twice. The two cases, by the way, for the members opposite, were the case of the Kirwans and Gordie Kirwan, raised by our leader, and the case of a deal he had made with the Metropolitan Toronto School Board, which he had denied originally and later had to own up to.

One of the great flaws of this bill is it removes the democratic rights of this Legislature and the people of Ontario to know what's going to happen in education, to have some input into local decisions. In fact, by making all

of the decisions through regulation, the government and John Snobelen and Mike Harris have effectively removed any positive, any constructive input, and any consultation. Any semblance of the democracy that we have they have removed entirely from education.

The other part of this bill which has not received any attention because it's not there — although in section 257 the minister does grant himself the powers of the funding formula, but there are no details. Why did the minister promise that we would have a funding formula in March of this year? Why did he reiterate that promise that we would have it in May of this year? Why did he say a third time that we would have it in September of this year? Now we're supposed to trust that he's going to have it in November? My God, is there no plan?

Will we know what the designs of this government for the provision of education for our children are? Why are they so afraid to tell us? Why do they keep saying to the people of Ontario, "Trust us, take a leap of faith," when their track record has been broken promises, has been flip-flops, has been the absolute admission of wanting to cause the system to become bankrupt and to create a crisis in that system? There is no trust. There is no credibility. We are not buying what this minister is saying.

The minister is making it up as he goes along: a new curriculum, which I might add is not really so terrible. In fact it's a virtual copy of something that was implemented in my neighbourhood in North York over five years ago. It's a good start. It's not the end product. We need to go further. But the minister seems to think he can misdirect and confuse the public by dropping some of these things. Standardized testing, three grades — in North York, I should tell the members, we have nine grades of standardized testing. Why are we being forced to accept less? Because the minister has no plan. He's just making it up. He doesn't know where he wants to go with this, except that he wants to get $1 billion from our kids and from education. By the way, half of that has been earmarked from Metropolitan Toronto and that is going to have a serious detriment on kids in my neighbourhood.

The provisions in this bill, which are extraordinary, are telling teachers, telling the public that you can no longer negotiate, you can no longer have a conversation. "We're going to control the purse-strings but you can no longer make any kind of local determination about the types of programs, about the needs of the local community." That's absolutely unconscionable. When the government says, "We will reduce preparation time," in other words, they are eliminating the numbers of teachers: 6,000 teachers in Ontario is the result of a reduction of 50% of secondary school preparation time. Six thousand teachers and, by the way, that's a conservative estimate. The federations are predicting upwards of 10,000.

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: That is not a funny matter, I would say to my friend the member for Perth: 6,000 teachers is not going to lower the class sizes. It's interesting, when the minister talks about class size and he's now going to have the power to regulate it, he uses some very interesting language. He says we have a 17 to 1 pupil-teacher ratio and an average class size of 25 in the province, and he's wondering why the difference. Where is the difference? He would know, and I hope all members would know, that we have a very progressive policy that was introduced by a prior Conservative government. It was called special education.

We have class sizes of 8 to 1; we have class sizes of 12 to 1. It is good legislation. We support it. I know that all members in this House support it. If you want to know where those teachers are, go to those classrooms. You will find them working with very special children, children who deserve the kind of education and the kind of support that is going to enable them to reach their potential.

It seems that the minister is caught up in this numbers game. He just wants to say, for whatever purposes — we know the purpose, which is to take dollars out — "Where are the teachers? They are not being productive." By bashing teachers, by vilifying a very dedicated group of professionals, he is using that in a machiavellian way to try to sell the public, to get them on his side. It's not working. It does a disservice to him, it does a disservice to the profession, and I really wish he would stop and admit the fine work that teachers are doing in our schools.

The minister unveiled this announcement with great fanfare. He talked about extending the school year. We would have a longer school year. It took about 48 hours and he said, "My rural colleagues told me that this was a great problem because children are a source of cheap labour." That wasn't the real reason.

The minister, as Her Worship Hazel McCallion has said about the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing — they have just not done their homework. When they started to run the numbers, they found it was going to cost more. Gee, when people go to work earlier, you've got to open the buildings. You've got to clean the buildings, you've got to staff the buildings. You've got to have the teachers there. You have extra heating and lighting and other costs. It costs more, and that's not what this government is about. They're looking for ways to remove, to extract money, to steal money away from our kids. That is why the Minister of Education said we are not going to have a longer school year.

It's very interesting in the information that was quoted earlier that we have 185 school days. The minister would know, as well as his predecessor, that in fact we have 194 days of school. It is up to the minister to determine the number of days that exist right now. He could make it longer. He doesn't need this piece of legislation to do it. In fact, it is the minister who sanctions that and has, and that is nothing to be ashamed of.

I must tell you that this question of professional development days — I'm a parent and I've been a member of the public, but in my role as a school trustee I attended professional development sessions for teachers. I can tell you that the work that was being done was in mathematics, was in literacy, was about improving student performance and achievement, was about evaluation and assessment instruments and different methodologies. It

was about kids. The teachers were there, they were learning, and they were taking those lessons back to the classrooms and they were using it to improve their lessons and they were using it for the betterment of students.

For this minister or any member to get up and suggest that the training and the time spent on making our teachers better teachers and helping them and equipping them with the latest pedagogy and having an opportunity to share information with fellow teachers is a bad thing goes against absolutely every shred of educational research, goes against every shred of research in the private sector, which says that moneys and dollars you spend on training your staff returns manyfold in terms of productivity and in terms of results.

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I'm absolutely shocked and dismayed at the impression that members opposite are leaving when they make these statements that teachers will now be in front of the students more and somehow this will be better. When the teachers are in front of the students, it is because they have the knowledge, the experience and are armed with every tool at their disposal. The way you do that, I say to all members, is through professional development. We require a great deal more commitment to it, not less.

As I had said, the minister set up his expert panels, with the two individuals I've named, but they recommended that any savings found through any of these initiatives be reinvested back in the classroom. That's not a radical statement. In fact, in health care the minister has stood up and said if he finds any savings, he will reinvest them back in hospitals.

Why can't the Minister of Education, why can't the Premier stand up and follow the expert advice that he has gone out and sought and commit today that he will invest any dollars that are found through his exercise in savings into education, into our schools? It doesn't take much. All he has to do is say yes. But he refuses to. Is it any wonder why there is no confidence in this government? Is it any wonder why people do not believe that John Snobelen and Mike Harris have the best interests of children at heart? It's because they will not make that very simple commitment. Commit today.

There was another recommendation from the Education Improvement Commission that preparation time be reduced 25%. He has gone further. He doesn't follow the advice of his experts; he merely tries to use that as a buffer to achieve his own ends and his own goals.

I am absolutely shocked that the minister would not be up front. He has said this bill will make him and make the government more accountable. If anything does that, I certainly applaud it, but I don't believe it, because this government refuses to be held accountable for their previous cuts to education, for their future planned cuts to education, for dropping junior kindergarten, adult education, for reduced support to special education, for all these things and quite a bit more: for the crisis that the minister said he wanted to create and in fact has created. He is accountable. He must be held accountable and he will be held accountable.

Earlier this evening I was at Don Valley Junior High School. This is the agenda from their meeting. A group of about 30 parents were there. This was their first meeting as a school advisory council. They asked me to come and talk, but more important, they asked me to come and listen. There was not one parent who said they thought the minister had any credibility. There was not one parent who said they had any confidence in this government to look after the interests of their children.

They wanted a very direct message to go to Mike Harris and to John Snobelen: Stop now. Commit now that you will not remove $1 billion from their kids and from their education. Commit now that there will be no more reductions to special education. Enough is enough. You've gone too far already. It's time to pull back. Our education system is not a mess. We've done a great job. It can be improved, but work with them, don't work against them. That is the message from the school advisory council at Don Valley junior high.

I'm very pleased to have had this opportunity to speak to Bill 160 and I look forward to the very insightful comments of my colleagues.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Wildman: I just want to congratulate the member for Oriole on his presentation on Bill 160 and take this opportunity, since it's the first time I've had an opportunity to respond to him, to congratulate him on his success in the by-election and to wish him well in his duties representing his constituents here in this House.

Obviously, he is concerned about the future of education for the students in his constituency and across the province. He raises a very important point when he quotes the parents' council of Don Valley Junior High School, when he talks about what the cuts have meant already for the education of those students and what it will mean if another $1 billion is taken out of education.

He asks for a commitment from the minister and from the Premier, from the government that if more money is to be saved, they make a commitment that it not be taken out of education but it be reinvested in education so it will benefit the students who are the central reason for the whole education system. I think that's a very good point. I call on the minister, along with my friend from Oriole, to make that commitment tonight, that if there are any further savings from the measures he's taking with regard to the school system, they will be reinvested in the education of students.

I also call on the minister to ensure that he does not treat education as a way of getting money out and giving it to the Treasurer. I call on the minister most of all to contact the teachers, to talk to the teachers to ensure that we don't have a disruption of education in this province, to work with them for the betterment of education for students, to quit attacking them and through them attacking the students of Ontario.

Mr Stewart: I have to stand and make a comment about the member for Oriole and one of the comments he made when he referred to rural farm people as getting cheap child labour. I take great offence at that,

representing a rural riding and being from a farm family. The families of farmers work side by side to improve this province. If he suggests that the farm people in this province are suggesting that they get cheap child labour, I have real difficulty with that.

I also have difficulty when I hear the rhetoric of the Liberals suggesting there are 6,000 teachers going to be laid off. The NDP says 10,000. Why don't you prove what you're talking about? You're using this type of rhetoric. Nobody is telling it the way it is.

Interjections.

Mr Stewart: We must have hit a note, because you're reacting. That is great. You know you cannot back it up.

One of the things we have in that bill is a 10-day exam time. The Peterborough Board of Education has gone to a 10-day exam time, and I applaud them for that. I suggest to them they should stand up and tell everybody, because it does work, it does create efficiencies, and I can tell you they're a perfect example of trying to make things better, with the amount of resistance we seem to be getting on a continual basis.

Again I have to go back to the criticism that the member for Oriole made about the farm families of this province. They do not have cheap child labour. They work side by side to create a tremendous rural family element in this province.

Mr Bartolucci: First of all, I'd like to thank the member for Oriole for his very insightful words. What he did was summarize Bill 160 very succinctly but very exactly as well. It's all about removing money to pay for Mike Harris's tax cut. There's absolutely no question about that. We're going to sacrifice another $1.1 billion to ensure that we deliver on the tax cut promise. We don't care what it does to the education system; we're only concerned with the withdrawal of money. That's the government thinking and speaking. We say on this side of the House that that's the wrong direction for you to go in, in education. That's what the member for Oriole was saying.

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He's also saying that's an enormous power grab for the minister and for Premier Mike Harris. That's what this bill is all about as well. It's all about removing any power at all from the local people, and you know what? If an education system is going to be successful, it has to reflect the local needs and the local requirements in order to teach the children at a local level. This bill takes all that power away.

What the member for Oriole is saying as well is that the students and the parents of Ontario are willing to stand up for teachers. They're ready to defend teachers and they're able to work with teachers and all the partners in education to ensure we have a system of education that is the best in the world. All the partners in education are also saying that this is the wrong direction, but they're also telling you, and I hope you're listening, that they won't back down. They don't want to be forced to do something they don't feel good about, but they won't back down. They want you to change.

Mr Silipo: I want to congratulate the member for Oriole on his speech this evening. Although I know he has spoken in this House on prior occasions, it's the first time I've had the chance to listen to him here in the House. I've caught snippets of his comments earlier on in the week on television but I want to congratulate him for intervening in this particular debate and in focusing, as he has done, on the impact the cuts to education that are going to come as a result of this bill and the other actions that the government is taking will have.

He also mentioned, as a member from the Metropolitan Toronto area, the impact this is going to have on schools here in Metro. Some $500 million of the $1 billion in cuts are expected to come out of the Toronto school systems. It used to be that there was some thinking that went along among the government members, and indeed even some people out in the educational community, that the money that was going to come out of Toronto was going to somehow be spread out among the rest of the system.

Then we discovered, as the minister has people coming together with the different funding formulas, that because of the $1 billion they need to take out, none of that money is going anywhere else except to the coffers of the Minister of Finance. In fact, the money is going to come right out of the system and we're going to see, whether you're Catholic boards or public boards, whether you're in public schools or Catholic schools, that what we're going to have at the end of the day is less money being spent in our classrooms.

One thing that becomes more and more clear to me, and I think it's becoming clearer out there, is that as the minister continues with his rage to take away virtually every significant power that school boards have, at the end of the day parents and people in the community will know that whatever cuts happened are going to land on his doorstep and on the doorstep of the Premier of this province, and they won't be able to hide behind school boards any longer.

The Speaker: Response?

Mr Caplan: I'd like to thank the members for Algoma, Peterborough and Dovercourt for their comments earlier.

I'd like to focus on the member for Peterborough. He throws some numbers out and asks us to back them up. I would challenge him if we can, and we certainly can: Will you vote against Bill 160? Will you commit to that, sir? I suspect the answer is no. In fact, the member for Peterborough thinks it's right to eliminate 6,000 teachers in the province.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, member for Peterborough.

Mr Caplan: We've heard it all. In his comments he said he can't understand the amount of resistance they're having. Perhaps he has no further to look than to the Minister of Education, who has no credibility with parents, no credibility with students, no credibility with teachers. When the minister says, "Trust me, this is for your benefit," no one believes him. When the minister will not commit to investing any savings found through these exercises back into classrooms in Ontario, why should we

trust him? Why should anyone in the province trust him? I think even the member for Peterborough knows he shouldn't trust the Minister of Education because the minister does not have the best interests of children at heart.

This is a very passionate matter for me. I am a father. I want the best education for my son and for all children in Ontario. The $1 billion, on top of the half a billion already cut will not provide that, and the minister could and should take appropriate action.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Silipo: I'm glad to have the opportunity to at least begin some comments this evening and hope to be here to continue whenever this debate resumes, because I believe that regardless of how the ebb and flow of this debate goes — and we've seen tonight the various moments of sometimes loud, sometimes quieter, sometimes impassioned, sometimes just thoughtful rationale — however we express our views, it's fair to say that what is envisaged in Bill 160 and what Bill 160 represents is part of a significant discussion about where we believe the school system of this province should go.

I come at this, as all of us do, with a particular bias. I want to tell you, Speaker, the word "bias" as I use it is meant in its most positive of terms. I recall one grade 9 teacher of mine reminding us when he put that word up on the board and went on to describe it that "bias" means all that makes each and every one of us in our thinking and all the experiences we've had, and therefore the points of view and the perspective we bring to things. The perspective I bring to this discussion is yes, as a politician, having been involved as a member of this House, in government as Minister of Education for a few years, in opposition now, as a former school trustee, but probably the most significant perspective I can bring is that of a parent.

I think others in this House can speak equally to that issue from that perspective as parents and grandparents, as we've already heard tonight. I don't expect that whatever our perspective is, even if we all speak to this issue as parents, we would agree. Part of the process is accepting that there is disagreement.

What bothers me as I follow this debate and now as I have a chance to say a few words in the course of this debate is how much the debate is really focusing around perceptions that are so different, and how we come at this with a perspective that is so fast and so polarized. I have to say to the Minister of Education that he needs to take responsibility for a great part of that polarization.

I think one of the media scribes, Thomas Walkom, actually hit it on the head today in his comments in his column. I think he's written some brilliant columns and I think he's missed the point entirely on a couple of issues, but on this one today I think he's dead on.

Mr Wettlaufer: Why don't you get somebody who is objective?

Mr Silipo: The member here says, "Why don't you get somebody who's objective?" We can quote whoever we want, and as I said, I don't always agree with what Thomas Walkom has to say, but I think this column today reflects very clearly what I believe this government is up to. The confrontation we are virtually on the eve of seeing is not coming about by accident; it is a well-calculated move.

I don't say this is by all the members of the government caucus. I would say with all due respect to them that most of them don't have a clue as to what strategy Premier Harris and his cohorts have on this. They wouldn't dare tell them that the strategy behind all this is to seek out a confrontation with the teachers of this province, to try to make the teachers of this province the scapegoats for the fundamental changes in the school system that this minister and this Premier want to bring about.

Yes, that fundamental change has something to do with focusing the system. Of course it does. There is always a little bit of truth in what the minister says, a tiny bit of truth, but none the less there is a little bit of truth in what the minister says. When he talks about some of the things we began as a government and that he's continuing in terms of focusing the resources on having a clearer reporting system to parents, on having clearer standards, on ensuring that we know what is being taught in our schools, that parents understand what their children are learning, that teachers know that we do expect more of them, all those things are good and useful things. But that's not what Bill 160 is about.

Bill 160 is not about making the system better, because if you were interested in making the system better, you would not begin from the premise that we are spending too much money on education. You might want to talk about how you'd refocus the spending in the system; you might want to talk about how you can take some money out of administration and put it back into the classroom, but that's not what you're doing.

Mr Wettlaufer: Who says we're spending too much money in the classroom?

Mr Silipo: I hear, "Who says that's what we're doing?"

The Speaker: Member for Kitchener, I've warned you three or four times. There's one minute left. I suggest you come to order.

Mr Silipo: I'm glad I have their attention. Any time I get the attention of the government backbenchers it elates me, because I feel we're getting somewhere maybe.

I want to say to the minister and to the members of the government caucus, if this was about making the system better, then you would have your minister stand up on the myriad of occasions we give him every single day and say: "You know what? I don't want to take $1 billion out of the system. That's not my intent."

Interjection.

Mr Silipo: No, he has not said that, and we have given him every opportunity possible. He will continue to get those opportunities day in and day out. But he doesn't say that. You know that better than I. He's not even talking about redirecting any of the resources, any of the moneys he's going to save from whatever number of thousands of teachers who are going to come out of the system; they're going to come out the system.

You see, if he was interested in improving the quality of education, then he would be saying, "Those teachers are going to go back into the classroom," but that's not what he's doing. He's talking about how to take teachers out of the system. That's not going to improve the system one bit. If my comments are hurried, it's not just because time is running out this evening; it's because I feel very strongly that this minister and this Premier are dismantling the school system in this province and taking one big, giant step towards privatizing the school system in this province. That's their ultimate agenda. Most of their backbenchers haven't even clued in that this is just step number one in that big jump Mike Harris and John Snobelen want to take us to.

I'd like to adjourn the debate, Speaker, and would like the opportunity to resume.

The Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2132.

ERRATA

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1er octobre 1997

The House met at 1333.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPORTS FUNDING

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I believe everyone in this House would have nothing but praise for the people who work for, promote and volunteer for amateur sports organizations across the province. Indeed every community in Ontario, including my home town of Thunder Bay, relies on those organizations to see that our young people have access to sports they love.

So it is disheartening to learn that the government is delaying providing the funds needed by these organizations to do their job and is asking these groups to go through extraordinary hoops before their funds for this year will be freed up. Indeed the protracted approval process created through this government's new and supposedly improved sports strategy is creating a mockery in terms of this government's call for accountability.

What we have six months into this fiscal year is a situation where only six of 55 provincial sports organizations, to our knowledge, have received their much-needed funds to support the programs our young people both need and expect.

One organization caught in the crossfire of this process is the Hockey Development Centre for Ontario, the main support agency for amateur hockey across the province, including the Thunder Bay Amateur Hockey Association. In fact, Lou Salatino, a Thunder Bay resident who serves as chairman of the HDCO, has told me that the government's demands and sheer bullheadedness are seriously hampering the ability of his umbrella organization to do the work they need to do to keep amateur hockey moving ahead in the province of Ontario.

Today I implore the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation to free up those funds so as not to further delay the implementation of so many vital programs. Minister, it's time to get out of the stands and on to the ice. Get the game under way.

MARY SILAJ

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): In these very difficult times, from time to time a person or occasion challenges us in a deep and personal way. The deaths of Mother Teresa and Princess Diana were events of this nature.

In our own lives we also happen upon people who have that same disturbing yet uplifting effect. They remind us of what is important in life. They tell us to stop and smell the roses, to get in touch with our spiritual side and to know that there is indeed a creator God who loves us very much.

Mary Silaj from Elliot Lake is just such a person. Mary is not well and will soon leave us. That will be a huge loss to her family, her friends and her community. Mary loves life, loves people and loves to teach and to read. She epitomizes the best in all of us. Mary continues to nurture the world through the lives of the men and women she taught as a teacher.

Mary often waxes philosophical, has a tremendous sense of humour and reads with an appetite. Just this morning, she likened her passing on to going to that library of all libraries, where every book will be at her call, as indeed will be many of her favourite authors.

Mary, we love you and appreciate every moment we are blessed with your presence. Our world is a better place because of you.

GUELPH HOSPITALS

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph): Last Thursday the people in the city of Guelph were celebrating because Minister Wilson came to our riding for a ground-breaking ceremony at Guelph General Hospital.

The Guelph General and St Joseph's Hospital and Home have served patients in Guelph and Wellington county for over 100 years, but in the past 20 years Guelph has been trying to streamline its hospital services. It has been a difficult task. We all knew restructuring was needed, but it was tough. To make matters worse, previous governments were unable to fund new hospital services for Guelph.

During the provincial campaign two years ago, I made a personal commitment to the citizens of Guelph to finally obtain the money that was needed to do the work. Last March, Minister Wilson announced the long-awaited funding of $67.7 million, and on Thursday construction finally began. It's going to result in the renovation of Guelph General Hospital to create a new acute care centre for our city. St Joseph's will become the rehab and long-term-care centre. Both hospitals are scheduled to open in the year 2000.

I am proud to stand today and acknowledge and commend the cooperation of the city, the county and both

hospitals. In Guelph, we are going to deliver less waste, less duplication, better services and better-quality health care. Our government is spending an unprecedented $18.3 billion on health care. Guelph very much appreciates the wonderful investment made in our hospitals.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I'd like to share some excerpts of faxes and e-mails I've received over the course of the last 24 hours.

The first one is from Michèle Robichaud from Sudbury: "I don't want to" walk out. "I feel provoked into taking this action." This government wants to "meet their political promises on my back. Sorry. I've got wide shoulders but they're for my students whom I love and respect and for whose future I will be fighting...."

This one is from the teachers and staff of Pius XII elementary school. We all know, they say, that Bill 160 is about taking $1 billion plus from the educational funding and future of our children.

This one is from Brian Kirlin, a teacher with the York Catholic Teachers: "It is my hope that the opposition parties," together with all educating partners, "will succeed in backing this government off its tyrannical agenda, an agenda which will destroy the standards of education we have worked so hard to achieve."

This one is from Daniel Johnson, a teacher in the Nipissing riding: "Thank you for your efforts. Keep up the fight and remember we are with you out here as the unconsulted minority of the Nipissing riding."

This final one is from James Russell from Sydenham, Ontario. He asks at the very end a very, very important question: "Can you tell me why I can't e-mail any Conservative members of Queen's Park? All their e-mail addresses come up access denied."

This is the epitaph of this government: access denied.

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LABOUR LEGISLATION

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): By now everyone will know that the government, faced with the united province of workers who were not about to accept Bill 136 being rammed down their throats, caved in. This is a major victory on the part of the labour movement and the people who support the labour movement in all our communities.

Unfortunately what did not play out as much in the media — and it's understandable because it doesn't generate headlines as does the possibility of a province-wide strike — but what played out behind the scenes was one of the most disrespectful, dishonourable, anti-democratic procedures we could ever have seen.

I want to express this through the position that Bruce Carpenter, president of the Provincial Federation of Ontario Firefighters, went through. Up until Monday, shortly after noon, like everyone else in this province, he didn't know if he would be out on strike or what the situation would be. From 3:30 Monday afternoon until 5 o'clock yesterday, the committee had the only opportunity to comment on the over 200 amendments that were in front of us on Bill 136. Yesterday afternoon he had to go through what I consider to be the indignity and the disrespect of not even being able to come to the table and comment on virtually a new labour law that affects the negotiation of his members. At 5 o'clock yesterday that discussion shut down and there was no further debate.

This is not democracy; this is tyranny.

MS COLUMBUS

Mrs Barbara Fisher (Bruce): I rise this afternoon to express my sincere congratulations to all those who helped in organizing a recent reception on board the Hapag-Lloyd Tours' newest cruise ship, the MS Columbus, for its inaugural call at Tobermory. I was very honoured to have been invited to represent my riding of Bruce at their special event.

The MS Columbus cost almost $120 million to construct, and it is the first of its kind to have been specifically designed and outfitted for cruising in the Great Lakes and travelling through the Welland lock system. The ship has 205 cabins, eight suites, and can hold up to 420 passengers. A crew of 169 is required to attend to all passenger needs. Measuring 472 feet long, the MS Columbus has the engine capacity to cruise at 18.5 knots.

In 1996, there were a total of 413,000 tourism jobs in this province, and tourists spent a total of $13.6 billion that year. The growth of the thriving industry is expected to triple by the year 2010.

Ontario must strive to become a world leader in this industry. While Canada's coastal provinces are already enjoying the rewards of offering their towns and cities as ports of call for cruise ships, Ontario has just begun to see the vast potential the Ontario cruise industry will provide.

Today, through the cooperation of regional development agencies and Hapag-Lloyd Tours, Ontarians, including those in my riding of Bruce, may begin to enjoy the added revenues they much need in tourism.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms Annamarie Castrilli (Downsview): I rise today to bring to the House the Ombudsman's report on the case of Mr S, who had to travel to Toronto from his home in Ottawa for a high-tech visual assessment. Mr S was refused travel support by the Ministry of Health and sought the assistance of the Ombudsman when all other avenues had been exhausted. The real issue here is one that goes to the heart of our health care system. Excellent quality health care should be available to all Ontarians regardless of where they live in the province.

Today in the standing committee on the Ombudsman the Conservative majority refused to support the motion of my colleague the member for Kingston and The Islands that the Ministry of Health ensure that appropriate financial assistance be provided to applicants of the assistive

devices program to offset the cost of their travel to the program-approved assessment centre where such assessments are necessary for the purpose of determining their eligibility under the program for high-technology visual aids.

It is disgraceful that a government which claims that there is only one taxpayer quibbles about whether the money for travel support comes from the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The bottom line is that there is inadequate access to health facilities in the first place, and then the patient suffers. Ontarians have said loud and clear that they will not accept a two-tier health care system.

Once again, the Ombudsman, the neutral party of last resort, has had to sound the alarm about the consequences of this government's tunnel vision and slash-and-burn fiscal policies. Once again, the report of the Ombudsman proves that Mike Harris just isn't listening.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): This government has deliberately provoked a confrontation with Ontario's teachers, a confrontation that now threatens the education of students right across the province. In 90 days there will be new school boards setting up all over the province with no idea of how much money they will have to spend educating our children.

Parents are uncertain. They don't know whether their children's education will be disrupted in the next few weeks. They have no idea how many tax dollars are going to be invested in education across Ontario. This government has to release the exact figures for stabilized funding for each of the new school boards and make public the funding formula so that we will know exactly how much the government intends to spend educating our children starting in September 1998.

The government has indicated that it intends to cut $1 billion from our schools. Now the government is saying that perhaps $1 billion is not the target. This government needs to guarantee spending on education, that there will not be any further cuts on the education of our children and the quality of education for our students in Ontario. This government has to make clear that they're committed to good quality education, that they're not about setting up a crisis so that teachers will be forced out on strike, disrupting education in Ontario.

ROSH HASHANAH

Mrs Lillian Ross (Hamilton West): Tonight marks the beginning of an important holy day for members of the Jewish community in my riding and across the province. Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, marks a time for the children of Israel to reflect on their lives and the year ahead. While most Jewish holidays celebrate national events in Jewish history, Rosh Hashanah is much more personal in nature.

In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah is one of the Yamim Nora'im, or Days of Awe, more commonly referred to in English as the High Holy Days. On this holy day, Jews are called to examine their lives during the preceding year. One powerful instrument used to motivate repentance during Rosh Hashanah is the shofar, a ram's horn, which is blown in synagogues on Rosh Hashanah. The great Jewish leader, Maimonides, describes the goal of the piercing cry of the shofar as "an allusion, as if to say: 'Awake, O you sleepers. Awake from your sleep. O you slumberers, awake from your slumber. Search your deeds and turn in repentance.'"

Rabbis have long encouraged Jews to observe Rosh Hashanah in a spirit of optimism. For example, they ordain that honey be served at all Rosh Hashanah meals and that slices of apple be dipped into it. A special prayer is then recited: "May it be thy will, O Lord, our God, to grant us a year that is good and sweet."

I would like to extend to members of the Jewish community in my riding, particularly Adas Israel, Beth Jacob and Anshe Sholom synagogues, every blessing for this holy day. May the Lord grant that the year ahead be indeed good and sweet.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on administration of justice and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 155, An Act proclaiming Victims of Violent Crime Commemoration Week, the title of which is amended to read "An Act proclaiming Victims of Violent Crime Week."

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMMITTE ON RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on resources development and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 136, An Act to provide for the expeditious resolution of disputes during collective bargaining in certain sectors and to facilitate collective bargaining following restructuring in the public sector and to make certain amendments to the Employment Standards Act and the Pay Equity Act.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the "ayes" have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1350 to 1355.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Jordan, W. Leo	Ross, Lillian
Boushy, Dave	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Carroll, Jack	Leach, Al	Sampson, Rob
Chudleigh, Ted	Leadston, Gary L.	Saunderson, William
Cunningham, Dianne	Marland, Margaret	Shea, Derwyn
Danford, Harry	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sheehan, Frank
Doyle, Ed	Maves, Bart	Smith, Bruce
Elliott, Brenda	McLean, Allan K.	Snobelen, John
Eves, Ernie L.	Munro, Julia	Sterling, Norman W.
Fisher, Barbara	Murdoch, Bill	Tilson, David
Ford, Douglas B.	Mushinski, Marilyn	Tsubouchi, David H.
Galt, Doug	Newman, Dan	Turnbull, David
Harnick, Charles	O'Toole, John	Villeneuve, Noble
Harris, Michael D.	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Hodgson, Chris	Palladini, Al	Wilson, Jim
Jackson, Cameron	Parker, John L.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Johns, Helen	Pettit, Trevor	Wood, Bob
Johnson, Bert	Preston, Peter	Young, Terence H.
Johnson, David	Rollins, E.J. Douglas	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Curling, Alvin	Marchese, Rosario
Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Martin, Tony
Bradley, James J.	Gerretsen, John	McLeod, Lyn
Brown, Michael A.	Grandmaître, Bernard	North, Peter
Caplan, David	Gravelle, Michael	Patten, Richard
Castrilli, Annamarie	Hampton, Howard	Phillips, Gerry
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Pouliot, Gilles
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Pupatello, Sandra
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Cordiano, Joseph	Lankin, Frances	Wildman, Bud
Crozier, Bruce	Laughren, Floyd	Wood, Len
Cullen, Alex	Lessard, Wayne	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 56; the nays are 38.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 17, 1997, the bill is ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SENIOR CITIZENS

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): It's with great pleasure that I rise in the House today on behalf of the government of Ontario to recognize International Day of Older Persons, which is celebrated at the beginning of Community Support Month in Ontario.

International Day of Older Persons is declared by the United Nations and is an opportunity each year to reflect on the contributions of older persons to our society. This is a day for recognition of the contributions Ontario's 1.4 million seniors have made and continue to make to the quality of life we enjoy today in Ontario. These people fought for our freedom, struggled through a depression, raised their children and families and laid the foundation of societal standards so coveted by the world today.

Seniors continue to play an integral part in our everyday lives. Through their caring and sharing, they touch the lives of their grandchildren, they volunteer with our youth, they provide leadership and time on committees, and they support those more frail and less fortunate than themselves.

In the next few months I will be meeting with Canada's ministers responsible for seniors to discuss issues of importance to seniors, their families and those who work with seniors. Among the topics we will address are agism, continuing care and intergenerational concerns, and how Canada and the provinces will mark 1999, designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Older Persons.

The Ontario Community Support Association represents more than 300 community-based, not-for-profit health and social service organizations which work daily with older persons and the less fortunate in our society.

Community Support Month is a time to especially thank those many volunteers and staff who work for those organizations which not only look after the elderly but also the disabled and those with special needs. Present in the Legislature today are Mr Scott Forfar, Ada Wong and Elizabeth Fulford, the president of the Ontario Community Support Association.

Throughout this month, I ask my colleagues on all sides of the House to take time to participate in the many community events which mark Meals on Wheels Week from October 5 to 11, Community Care Worker Week from October 13 to 19, and Friendly Visiting/Telephone Reassurance Day on October 29.

This government is committed to our elderly population and to enhancing community support programs for them. Since 1995, this government has increased funding for community-based long-term-care services by over $75.7 million. As of today, 42 of the 43 new community care access centres have been opened to provide one-stop shopping centres for the elderly and the disabled to access home care support programs and long-term-care services. By the end of this year, all of the province's community care access centres will be fully operational. Our seniors will finally be receiving the right care at the right time in the right place, with the right person providing those important services here in Ontario.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I am happy to rise and on behalf of the Liberal Party recognize

International Day of Older Persons, and particularly glad to recognize some of the thrust to try and integrate seniors and others approaching senior age into society and the programs that do that. It's especially appropriate to recognize the community supports that are essential if seniors are to be respected in the way they absolutely deserve.

I'm sure that many of the people in this House will travel, as I have on other occasions, with the Meals on Wheels programs to see how important the contact is that the volunteers of those kinds of programs have with the seniors in society.

But I'm sure there's no one in this House who would like the remarking of this day to pass without reflecting on our responsibility and on this government's responsibility in particular in terms of how it's doing. If we are approaching a year like 1999 and the International Year of Older Persons, we really have to recognize how much greater the challenge has grown under the Harris government.

We look specifically at what has happened in terms of hospitals and health care. Last week every member of this House heard how the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce has verified that seniors, as disproportionate users of hospital services, have had $604 million worth of services taken away — those seniors who have been subject to substandard services despite the best efforts of nurses, doctors and administrators, who have found themselves compelled in some cases to tie seniors to beds in hospitals because they simply can't provide the personal service that they want, to take away meals before seniors have had time to finish them, not because they want to, not even in some cases because they know about it, but because there simply aren't enough people to attend to seniors in the way basic, fundamental respect would require us to.

The seniors in this province are not bed-blockers sitting in chronic care beds. They are people deserving of respect, and not the characterization they received last week from the Minister of Health talking about chronic care beds.

Certainly, if there was essential respect underlying this government's efforts towards seniors, we would have seen something different happen in terms of drug copayments. Every member of this House realizes it took 81 days for this government to turn around even the aggravated injury. The idea of charging seniors once is bad enough. To have 25 years of a free drug program, one that most seniors have counted on, have planned for, have put into their retirement options, summarily taken away is bad enough. But then, on top of that, to have this government charge those seniors twice in the same year and to take 81 days and a significant amount of pressure from seniors' organizations and this caucus to make it change its mind and to finally give seniors four months worth of credit for next year gives us an idea of how lacking the government is in that fundamental respect.

We approach another signal mark for this government. How will it treat seniors with regard to rent control? Seniors out there stand to lose under the so-called Tenant Protection Act the very security that we associate with people of older years. The very security that they depend on and have been able to depend on with other governments, this government would take away. It would make possible the turning of apartment buildings into condominiums, into parking lots, to take away even those seniors who have no intention of moving and therefore losing, as everyone does, the rent control, and being at the mercy of the marketplace. Many, many seniors will be discombobulated by this change on the part of this government, as disproportionate users of rental accommodation in this province. This government certainly has to take note of that.

Home care has been talked about. Last year in the budget, this government spent $4 million less than the year before. It budgeted a large increase but didn't spend it. All of us have learned from our grandparents and our parents the essence of having actions match words. Unfortunately, when it comes to this government, seniors would do well to double and triple and quadruple check. We know from our own discussions in seniors' home and the active seniors who are part of our community that they are doing exactly that. They know there are 16,000 of them — and other people who are disabled, but principally seniors — on a waiting list for long-term-care beds. They know that home care hours have been cut back in many communities, that they've been red-circled by departmental initiatives, actually taking away some of their ability to stay in their own homes.

I say to this House that we cannot comment on older persons' day without recommitting ourselves to do better. If this government wants to have anything close to a passing report card —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Responses, third party.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): I'm sure all members of the Legislature would want to join with the minister in recognition of the importance of the International Day of Older Persons and also pay tribute to the work that community support organizations do. I know in my own riding of Beaches-Woodbine, Senior Link is a vital part of our community that keeps our community healthy, that brings services to our seniors in their homes, that provides affordable housing for seniors who have moved out of their homes. The work of these organizations is critical to our sense of community and our sense of neighbourhood.

I suppose if the minister had stopped at those two points, we might have been able to spend more time in paying tribute to the contribution of seniors and the organizations that serve them and what it means to our community. But the minister goes on to say that this government is committed to the elder generation. He used the example of $75 million in community-based long-term-care services since 1995. I must say that it provokes in me a response to list a litany of just some of the things this government has undertaken as public policy and its effect on the seniors of our province.

Let me begin with the cancellation of the not-for-profit housing program. There is no new affordable housing for

seniors, a growing seniors population, being built in the province of Ontario because of your direct action of getting out of the business altogether of building affordable housing; and the downloading of the existing social housing stock to municipalities at a time when they are under such strain and do not have the fiscal resources to be able to deal with this threatens the existing stock. We already see moves coming about where they are increasing the number of market rent apartments and less affordable apartments in those social housing, not-for-profit buildings exactly because of the government's action.

What about the removal of rent controls? What is that going to mean? Your policy of vacancy decontrol means that seniors on fixed incomes who are in rent-controlled apartments right now will become prisoners in those apartments, not able to move because they won't be able to afford the rents anywhere else. In those older buildings where there are only one or two seniors left in the building, there will be greater harassment to get them out of that building so that those rents can be jacked up or the building can be razed and turned into a condominium.

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Let's talk about other things that come from the downloading. What about the increase in user fees for library services and for recreational programs for seniors, from a government that said no new user fees? It said a user fee is a tax; no new taxes, no new user fees.

Of course, you couldn't not then comment on the biggest user fee of all on seniors, the user fee that's been put in place for the drug benefit program. All of the experts said that would cause some seniors to make a choice between having necessary drugs or not. That is a shameful move. None of the research was in place to support the kind of drug education program that's needed. I know of seniors who are so worried about their fixed incomes that they've stopped taking needed medication because of the cost you've put in place for them.

Let's talk about the hospital cuts that have gone on before the home care and long-term-care expansions in the community. Your own hospital restructuring commission has identified the expansion that's needed and you're not putting it into place. The report that came out last week showed how $600 million of hospital services have been cut to seniors and how you have, in your own admission today, only increased home care services by $75 million over the last two years out in the community.

Let me say on that — you crow about that number a lot — that is less than what was budgeted for in the fiscal plan in the three years out of the last provincial government, our government, that recognized the need to put the services in the community before you made the cuts to hospitals to ensure that seniors had the supports they needed to stay healthy in the community.

Let's talk about what you're doing with the Red Cross right now. I'm amazed to hear the minister today try and blame it on the official opposition party and the third party. Minister, we used to fund the pay equity costs. You're refusing to fund the pay equity costs. We supported the not-for-profits in the delivery of services. You've opened it up to wide-open competition and a feeding frenzy for the for-profit organizations who are going out there, who are skimming the most intensive markets and leaving the rural markets and the harder to serve and the more costly to serve to the not-for-profits who cannot then compete on a competitive for-profit basis. That is a crisis. There are communities right across northern Ontario that will be without any home care, because the Red Cross is the only one in the business, directly as a result of your government's action.

Let's talk about nursing homes and the way you did away with the minimum hours of nursing care and what that means when you've got older, sicker seniors in there who are getting assembly-line care, who are not getting the kind of attention. This is not a proud record. When you meet with your counterpart ministers about the international year, this is what will mark your government.

ACCESS TO LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker, just very quickly: I wanted to draw to your attention a problem with respect to accessibility to the Legislature and the proceedings in the Legislature.

Two quick points: Yesterday, in the committee dealing with the social assistance bill and the disability income support plan bill, we found a situation where there were not interpreters being provided. That effectively meant that persons from the deaf community were unable to participate in the audience or to follow the proceedings. That particular issue was dealt with by the committee and we've attempted to resolve it. But it does raise the broader issue for members of the Legislative Assembly to take under consideration with respect to the accessibility of members of the deaf community.

It was suggested by one of the government members of the committee that captioning on the television should be turned on and that would solve the problem. It was pointed out by the clerk of the committee that budget cuts had meant that the captioning service has been cut, and I think this is a very serious issue.

Second, when the committee took its half-hour supper break at 6 o'clock — you will know now that we have more things going on in the Legislative Assembly in the evening in terms of debate in the House and in terms of committees sitting in the evening — a member of the public who was participating in these committees, who was monitoring the committee, Jeannie Kippay, who is in a wheelchair, went down to the back door, and you'll realize that's the only door that has wheelchair access, was unable to get out because there was not a security guard there and the system on the door that opens it automatically when someone approaches it is turned off at 6 o'clock. She was unable to leave the building until someone came along to open the door for her. When she attempted to return after having gotten a bite to eat, to come back to monitor the rest of the hearings, because

there was no guard at the door, she was unable to have any access to the building.

Mr Speaker, I would draw these issues to your attention and ask that perhaps through the Board of Internal Economy you take a look at what might be done to resolve these issues of access, particularly with respect to personning the back door with a security person to let people in.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): It's not a point of privilege. I will refer this to the Board of Internal Economy. If in future you have concerns such as this, if you would alert me, I'm sure we can handle it administratively by another option. But I hear what you say. It will be referred, and I'm certain we will deal with it at the Board of Internal Economy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. You are quoted as saying that school boards and teachers are not trusted to deliver quality education in Ontario. You should understand that at the very, very best of times that kind of statement is very, very unhelpful. But understanding that, you have brought things to the brink here in Ontario when it comes to our teachers. We are on the verge of a strike throughout the province that will involve 126,000 teachers, 2.1 million students and over one million households.

In that context, when teachers and parents right now are extremely sensitive to the kinds of signals that are being sent by their government and they're wondering whether you're doing everything you possibly can to resolve this matter, how could you then, in that context, fan these flames?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think you will find that both I and my cabinet colleagues, particularly the Minister of Education, have been very low-key, not fanning any flames, acknowledging the facts. The statement you quoted is quite true. That's the reason for the bill. That's the reason for the change. You see, what's happened is this: We're not getting the quality of education that is good enough, that competes with other jurisdictions. We know it's not a money problem because we spend more money. We know it's not a problem of our teachers; we have the best teachers in the world. So we have a problem with the system, and that is indeed what we are addressing: fewer trustees, fewer bureaucrats, more resources into the classroom. That is the purpose of the legislation and of the changes we are making to the system.

Mr McGuinty: I think it's important to note the Premier just said two things that are very important for us to understand. First of all, he effectively repeated his statement. He continues to say that trustees and teachers in Ontario cannot be trusted to deliver quality education. I can't believe it.

Interjections.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I'm out of order.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): And you're out of order. That goes without saying. Supplementary.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, where do you get off telling us that we can't trust our 126,000 teachers in Ontario and that we can't trust our trustees, duly elected locally by people who put their faith in them to address local education issues? Why can't we trust those people?

The second thing the Premier told us is that since we can't trust those groups of people — we can't trust our teachers, dedicated to teaching, and we can't trust our trustees, dedicated to local organization of education — we ought to trust the Premier with education in Ontario. This is the man who has already removed $533 million from our education system. Why should we trust you, Premier, given that you've already removed $533 million, you want to take another $1 billion out of the system and you want to lay off thousands of teachers?

Hon Mr Harris: The member may want to correct his record, but I will do it for him. If he wishes to apologize, that will be up to him. Never, ever have I said that we do not trust Ontario teachers. Never have I said that. I have said consistently that we have the best teachers in the world.

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But I do want to tell you that what we are asking for is a legislative change. Then you don't have to trust any politician, any party, any Premier, any trustee or any union. I have commented on the unions. These are the unions that negotiated an increase in class size of 4.7% from 1991-95. Why? To comply with the social contract. How did they react to the social contract? They called for an increase in the PTR of 4.75%. That is unacceptable to us as a way to cope with the changes the NDP brought in.

The Bruce County Board of Education was faced with a 3% reduction in operating expenditures. At the same time, enrolment fell by —

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier. Please come to order.

Mr McGuinty: The Premier is very reluctant, obviously, to quote those many examples of other cases throughout the province where teachers and trustees have in fact negotiated bigger class sizes. But do you know what they did? They took on four or five more students so they could keep junior kindergarten; they took on a few more students so they could save the speech pathologist; they took on a few more students so they could maintain the school librarian. They did that because you were making the cuts.

You want us to trust you with our students' education. You want us to trust you with the education of our kids. I'll tell you why we can't do that. You've already taken out $533 million. You're threatening to take out another $1 billion. You're cutting junior kindergarten, you're cutting special education, you're cutting adult education.

Given all of that, Premier, I'm going to ask you to put your ego aside, put the kids first and put your bill on ice.

Hon Mr Harris: Other than inflaming the rhetoric, which I don't think is helpful, I'm not sure what it is you're contributing to this debate.

You say I don't want to quote other examples. Durham separate increased maximum size of advanced secondary classes from 32 to 33. Why? So they could get a raise and get a 5% cut restored. Espanola public increased maximum size of advanced secondary classes from 27 to 28. Why? So they could get their 5% back on the grid. Lakehead District Roman Catholic Separate School Board, in the riding of the former minister who made the mess we inherited there, increased the PTR by 0.16% in elementary and 0.28% in secondary in a recent agreement.

You can talk about why teachers' unions and boards have negotiated an increase in class size. We're not interested in why. We're saying it's going to stop. We're bringing in legislation to stop it. So if you were interested, as we are interested, in the quality of education, in improving the contact time of teachers with students, you would be encouraging us to proceed with this legislation as quickly as possible.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Fort William, withdraw that comment.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): Mr Speaker, I can't withdraw it, because I believe this government is attacking teacher —

The Speaker: I name the member for Fort William, Mrs McLeod.

Mrs McLeod was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

HOME CARE

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Minister of Health. We learned today that 6,400 Red Cross homemakers could very well lose their jobs. These people serve 73,000 of our frail elderly Ontarians. They help them prepare meals, they help them with their groceries, they help them with their household chores. What they effectively do is help them continue to live in their homes.

The Red Cross has gone to you for help, and apparently there's some kind of juggling between you and the Minister of Labour as to who should assume responsibility for these 73,000 frail elderly Ontarians. I suggest to you, Minister, that those Ontarians, our seniors, the ones just referred to by your minister responsible for seniors in Ontario, are your responsibility.

I'm asking you, Minister, what are you going to do to ensure that those 73,000 frail elderly Ontarians continue to receive uninterrupted homemaker service?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I'll refer the question to the Minister of Labour.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): I would just like to go back to 1988, when your government introduced the Pay Equity Act. You indicated at that time that all employers who had 500 or more employees would be responsible for using the job-to-job method in the pay equity comparison.

At that time the Red Cross was the only homemaker service with more than 500 employees, so they were put in the position of using the job-to-job comparison. You also at that time indicated that the compliance date would be January 1, 1998. So this was established by the Peterson Liberal government at that time.

Since then the NDP had an opportunity to make changes, and unfortunately there have been none made whatsoever, so at the present time we have a situation where I understand they have written a letter, they've asked —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you very much. Supplementary?

Mr McGuinty: On behalf of the 73,000 senior Ontarians I'm asking this question for, I will be pleased to send them your response. The fact that the Minister of Health has referred the matter of ongoing home care for 73,000 frail elderly Ontarians is very telling.

That's what this is all about. Minister, at some point you're going to have to begin to assume responsibility for health care in Ontario. He claims he's the Minister of Health, but he's not responsible for hospital closings. He claims he's the Minister of Health, but now he's not responsible for the ongoing home care of 73,000 frail and elderly Ontarians.

Nobody gives a damn about a 1988 debate. Those 73,000 Ontarians today want to know what this Minister of Health is going to do, so back to you, Minister: What are you going to do?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would indicate to you that this problem was created by the 1988 legislation, but I would also —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister.

1430

Hon Mrs Witmer: I believe it's important to point out that there are presently 170 other homemaking services that are provided to taxpayers in this province. There is no one homemaking service that has any monopoly. Certainly we give you our assurance that services would continue to be delivered to people in this province.

Mr McGuinty: I knew a cabinet shuffle was coming, but I didn't know it had already taken place. It's going to cost, I understand, $36 million to keep these 73,000 seniors living in their homes. If you want to talk about real fiscal responsibility, guess how much it's going to cost if we stop funding that? How much is it going to cost if we instead institutionalize our seniors, people who have raised their families —

Interjections.

Mr McGuinty: If the minister has something to say —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr McGuinty: Those 73,000 frail elderly Ontarians don't want to hear anything about pay equity. They don't want to hear anything about what happened in 1988 in

terms of some parliamentary debate. All they want to know is that the Minister of Health is going to stand up and protect their interests, that the Minister of Health is going to do everything he can to ensure that they can live on in their homes for as long as they possibly can. That's all they want to know; it's as simple as that.

Once again, Minister of Health — and stop referring this to the Minister of Labour; I don't have a question for her, I have one for you — what are you going to do to help these seniors?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members for Hamilton East and Ottawa West, I'll warn you now, come to order. Next time I'll ask you to be removed. Minister.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Unfortunately it was the Pay Equity Act, 1988, that created the problem today. Even if we were to provide the financial funding, it would simply make the Red Cross uncompetitive in comparison to the other home care providers.

I say to you, leader of the third party, I know there was a letter that you received —

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'll wait, folks. We're going to wait the whole question period.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I know that the Premier recently received a letter from the Red Cross. In that letter they state, "We are respectfully requesting that all three party leaders come together on a non-partisan basis, putting people before politics to resolve this problem."

If the two opposition parties wish to come forward and work with us to find solutions to this dilemma, which has resulted from the requirements of the Pay Equity Act of 1988, I would encourage them to do so. But I can assure you, we will continue to provide the services to people in this province.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): A question for Premier: For the last two years your Minister of Education has provoked a senseless confrontation with Ontario's teachers. Your Minister of Education has gone across the province and he has prattled on about taking a further $1 billion from education. He has created a situation where 90 days from now new school boards have no idea what their budgets will be. He has created a situation where parents across the province are very concerned that their children's education will be disrupted in the next few weeks.

Premier, you can end this senseless confrontation of your Minister of Education. I ask you today to do two things: Withdraw Bill 160 until your Minister of Education presents his budget formula for all the new school boards; withdraw Bill 160 until the parents across this province know how much money is going to be available for the education of their children.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The leader of the New Democratic Party is totally mistaken when he says the changes we're talking about now have some effect 90 days from now. The changes we're talking about now have some effect in September 1998. The bill we are talking about now does facilitate the amalgamation of school boards, though, which takes place January 1. Because some were concerned with the changes about funding, the minister guaranteed stable funding right through to the end of this fiscal school year, guaranteed that funding right through this fiscal year.

What we're talking about that you are asking for is funding levels for 1998. Yes, the minister is working on those and those will be announced. But in the meantime we have a piece of legislation to facilitate fewer trustees, less pay for trustees, fewer bureaucrats and more money in the classroom, and I suggest we proceed with that.

Mr Hampton: The Premier obviously isn't listening to what's happening out there. He isn't listening to the meetings that are being attended by thousands and thousands of teachers. He isn't listening to the students who are leaving their schools even in his own home town to protest the cuts to education. No one believes your government's rhetoric. This Minister of Education said he wouldn't cut school budgets any further this year. Then he went out and took a further $300 million out of schools' budgets.

I put the question to you again, Premier. Parents want to know what the funding formula for education is in this province. School boards want to know what the funding formula for education is in this province. Will you withdraw Bill 160 until your Minister of Education presents the numbers, presents the budgets, so that parents and school boards will know how much money is available for the education of children in this province?

Hon Mr Harris: Other than the misinformation and the rhetoric that has been out there, this government, this Premier, this cabinet and this minister have been very straightforward, very honest, very up front about where the money is going, how much is there and where it will be. I agree with you there are some parents who have concerns about the misleading rhetoric coming from some of the teacher unions. There are some students who are concerned about the misleading rhetoric coming from the teacher unions. I don't think it's helpful for you to repeat that misleading rhetoric that's coming from the teacher unions. Rather, you'd be better to stick to the facts, and when you get to the facts they are this: Your government facilitated and accommodated school boards and teacher unions to increase class size so that they could have more money for other things, their own pay, restore the social contract and other things. This legislation will stop that from happening. The bill before the House —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I want to warn the members for Beaches-Woodbine and Sudbury East to come to order. I've warned you. Final supplementary.

1440

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Since the Premier doesn't like certain sources of information, I'll quote the Education Improvement Commission that he appointed, which called on the government to reinvest any money that is saved from restructuring or changes in the contracts or any of the changes in the powers and relations between the provincial government and teachers in the province. Even the Premier's good Conservative friend Hugh Segal has said that if you're going to restructure, you've got to keep the money in the system so it's done well. The Premier has indicated that maybe they aren't going to take $1 billion out of education but he won't give us a number.

Will the Premier guarantee today that he will not cut any more money from the education of our students in this province and that any savings he achieves will be reinvested in the schools of our province, in the education of our children? Will the Premier give us that guarantee?

Hon Mr Harris: We gave a guarantee in the campaign, post-campaign, yesterday, and I'm happy to give you the guarantee today. We will not cut a penny of education spending from the classrooms of the students of this province. I give you that commitment.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Harris: Second, we expect savings from following the Education Improvement Commission recommendations on prep time for secondary school — I think that was the recommendation of David Cooke, former NDP Minister of Education — and we expect some savings from fewer trustees, less pay for trustees and fewer bureaucrats. We are committed to reinvest every penny required to have a superior education system to the one you left us.

STEWART BRADDICK

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question again for the Premier, and I would say to the Premier it's remarkable how many "excepts" and "maybes" and weasel words he uses when he talks about education funding.

I want to ask the Premier about the new employee in his office, one Stewart Braddick, who you've hired as your director of organization. We know Mr Braddick worked for one Brian Mulroney and then was hired by the BC Liberal leader, Gordon Campbell, but he was forced to resign from his job in the BC Liberal caucus because it was found by the Auditor General in British Columbia that he had misspent $1 million of taxpayers' money. He had used $1 million of taxpayers' money to fund a partisan political piece of mail for the Liberal Party in British Columbia. He was forced to resign because of this abuse. Premier, why are you hiring someone who abused the public purse to the tune of $1 million?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. The third party, come to order.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The leader raises a question of an employee we have hired, somebody who has an outstanding record in Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, at the national level as well. In fact, he even worked for our good friend Jean Charest in the last campaign.

However, I think the issue you raise is that while he was working for the Liberal leader in British Columbia — and yes, Stew Braddick had disclosed to us that he was employed there when a direct mail campaign that had the approval of the caucus and of the leader, signed by the Liberal leader at the time, and a piece of literature I might say a little milder than the stuff I see you and the Liberals sending out in Ontario — the leader acknowledged as well that he had made a political decision to send the material in its form. There were questions raised about that mailout and Mr Braddick, to save the leader and the party from further embarrassment, resigned his position. That kind of honour is the kind we respect in Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Hampton: Premier, it's a remarkable and valiant effort you put forward, but the Auditor General of British Columbia was asked to investigate the situation. Yes, he said that the BC Liberal Party had misused its privileges, but then the Auditor General specifically found that Stewart Braddick, the person you have now hired, had misused $1 million of taxpayers' money.

I simply ask you this: What job do you have in your office that is so important that you have to hire somebody who lost his job in British Columbia because he misused $1 million of taxpayers' money and the Auditor General of that province found it to be so? What job do you have in your office that is so important that you have to hire someone like that?

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): What about this?

The Speaker: Member for Nepean, that's out of order. Thank you. Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: I think his job description is pretty straightforward and I believe appropriate. If you quote from the Auditor General of British Columbia, it was on the content of a Liberal mailing, including material of a partisan political nature, and some of the mailings were not personally addressed. In other words, they were, "Dear Householder."

You may want to check some of your mailings recently, leader of the third party, and you may want to be very careful in consulting a lawyer before you repeat the accusations outside the House that you made in here.

Mr Hampton: I will repeat the claim. The Auditor General of British Columbia found that there was a $1-million misuse of taxpayers' money and he identified the person you have now hired in your office, Stewart Braddick, as the person principally responsible.

If the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party wants to hire someone to do the kind of partisan dirty tricks that Mr Braddick is identified with, the Ontario Conservative Party can do that. But Premier, I want to ask you: Can you tell us why the taxpayers of Ontario should be paying the

salary of someone like Stewart Braddick, who has been identified with this $1-million misuse of public funds in British Columbia? Why should the taxpayers of Ontario pay this person's salary so he can work in your office?

1450

Hon Mr Harris: I'm not sure the question is worthy of an answer. When it comes to dirty tricks, nobody takes a back seat to the NDP of Ontario: nobody, no party, no individual. The kind of accusations that you are making in this Legislature are inappropriate and inaccurate. They are wrong and I invite him to step outside and repeat them.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Leader of the third party, you had a point of order?

Mr Hampton: On a point of privilege, Speaker: I put it to the Premier: You explain why taxpayers should pay this person's salary.

Interjections.

Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wonder if you can tell me whether it's in order that the NDP sent posters —

The Speaker: Member for Nepean, that's not in order.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I would like to address this question to the Minister of Health.

Interjections: Which one?

Mr Kennedy: Whichever minister would like to answer. It is a serious question. A lot of the back bench in this room would probably like to know about the small and rural health policy that this government put forward a number of months ago. Today we were to learn how that would work. We were to find out in Lambton county, where at the last minute, two days before the final report of the Health Services Restructuring Commission, the government stepped in and said, "Stop, we want to think this over."

Today, we hear their next report comes out and it takes away 30% of all the hospital beds, and it won't tell us what happens to Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital. You've made it a ping-pong between the DHC, the district health council — what will you tell the people —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I'm again flabbergasted the honourable member is opposed to what the commission's final directives outline as a health service plan for Lambton county. To quote the commission press release, it says:

"I want to stress that there will be no reduction of services as a result of these recommendations. There will be enhanced services for all Lambton county residents. We believe that our decisions will lead to improved quality and better access to a wide range of services for the population served by Lambton county," concluded Mr Doug Lawson, the commissioner.

The reinvestments of up to $7.5 million are being recommended for community services, home care, long-term care, rehabilitation services, mental health services; $1.9 million for sub-acute; $37 million in new construction — Lambton county hasn't seen that in its health care history; $19 million for other bells and whistles. It's a tremendous report for health care for Lambton county, and, yes, the commission has said that it's leaving it up to the DHC to implement the rural health care policy with respect to the hospital in Petrolia.

Mr Kennedy: All we know is that the health services commission has access to this minister's press release writers, because those words aren't borne out. When it comes to access to health services, what really matters here is that $18 million a year is being taken away from the people of Sarnia, Petrolia and the county of Lambton. You say you're giving them money back. They will lose more money in three years than you say you're going to reinvest at some future date.

Minister, you said there would be a rural policy that would take into account the special needs of rural Ontario. Instead, you're health restructuring commission has ignored it and they have not made a decision. Will you commit to stand by the decision of the district health council in terms of which hospital stays open? You've already allowed them to take $18 million. You've damaged the health service in that county. Will you at least allow Charlotte Englehart to stay open if the district health council says it will?

Hon Mr Wilson: That's what the policy says. If we took the Liberal and NDP benchmarks that were used and applied those across rural Ontario, it closed rural hospitals. We're not about closing rural hospitals; we're about opening those 68 emergency rooms that closed under the NDP. We've done that through a $70-an-hour on-call fee for physicians. We're about moving the hospital in Petrolia that you're talking about from 18 hours, which has been recommended over the years by the DHC, back up to 24-hour emergency care. That's what the rural health care policy calls for and that's what we're going to do in Petrolia for the people of Petrolia.

HOME CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Health. I want to ask the Minister of Health what he is going to do about all of the people who need home care in communities like Kenora, Dryden, Red Lake, Sioux Lookout, Fort Frances, Blind River, Elliot Lake, Wawa, White River, Dubreuilville, Timmins, Kapuskasing, Cochrane, Smooth Rock Falls, Iroquois Falls — I could go on. What are you going to do about providing home care in all those communities where the Red Cross will have to lay off the home care providers because your government is not providing the pay equity funding that has been ordered for all of those Red Cross home care providers?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Health): I'll refer the question to the Minister of Labour.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): To the leader of the third party, I certainly want to assure you

that services will continue to be provided for all of those individuals because I would just indicate one more time that there are many, many homemaker services available. Unfortunately, you had an opportunity in 1993 to correct the problem for the Red Cross when you made amendments to the Pay Equity Act, and you refused to take any action whatsoever. You actually made it worse.

Mr Hampton: Here is the situation. This is a government that has now been in power for two and a half years. The Ontario Court of Justice has found they violated the Constitution of Canada and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by trying to deny some of the lowest-paid workers in the province pay equity. Your cuts to pay equity have created this situation and your cuts to home care have created this situation, nothing else.

Minister, I guess you're the new Minister of Health, because the Minister of Health that we have refuses to be responsible for health care.

The reality is that in the communities I've listed there are no alternative providers. These are areas where your for-profit corporations don't want to bid because the cost of delivering home care is expensive and difficult. People are spread out over a large area. So there is no provider other than the Red Cross. What are you going to do to ensure that these people who need home care are going to get the home care they deserve and require?

1500

Hon Mrs Witmer: There are certainly many, many other homemaker service providers in this province who would be quite prepared to —

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): That's not true.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Member for Algoma, you can't say that. That's out of order. I ask you to withdraw.

Mr Wildman: The minister is incorrect.

The Speaker: Just withdraw the comment, member for Algoma.

Mr Wildman: I withdraw the comment, and she's still incorrect.

The Speaker: This is your last chance, or I'll have to name the member for Algoma. Simply withdraw.

Mr Wildman: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mrs Witmer: There are other homemaker services that are provided, that are prepared to provide the service.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): There are no other agencies there.

The Speaker: Member for Lake Nipigon, I'm not going to warn you again. Come to order. Members for Cochrane North and Lake Nipigon, come to order. Minister.

Hon Mrs Witmer: However, the question I would pose to the leader of the third party is the one that has been posed to us by the Red Cross, and that is, they are suggesting that all three parties come together and find a solution. I would ask you, what solutions do you have to deal with the Pay Equity Act, 1988, that created the dilemma that the Red Cross faces today?

FERRY SERVICE

Mrs Barbara Fisher (Bruce): My question this afternoon is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines with regards to the Chi-Cheemaun ferry service, which operates from Tobermory in my riding of Bruce to Manitoulin Island. As you know, the service provided by the Chi-Cheemaun is important to the riding of Bruce and it attracts and assists in drawing tourists to our area. What is the government doing to ensure that the ferry continues to provide efficient services to our area?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Minister of Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines): I want to thank the member for Bruce for a very important question. It's a welcome relief. As the member states and as you would know, the ferry service plays an important role in the Manitoulin-Bruce Peninsula area, and it's run by the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission.

Currently there has been a series of meetings taking place with local people, led by the chairman of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission and some board members, to discuss how they can improve the service. I want to thank the member for Bruce for her role in this. I know that tomorrow or Thursday they're meeting with local representation from the island and I look forward to seeing the progress the board takes from these local people who want to improve the service of the ferry.

Mrs Fisher: We have been working very hard in the community to further the efforts that can be made by the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission advisory board to bring further tourism to our area. I wonder if you could tell us about some of the innovative ideas that the ONTC has undertaken in the past while and what we might be able to look forward to for services in the future.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I predict that he can tell us.

Hon Mr Hodgson: As usual the member for St Catharines is clairvoyant. There have been a number of very useful suggestions that have come forward from this consultation. I again want to thank the member for Bruce for the role she has played in this.

This summer the ONTC board recommended that the ferry service launch a dinner cruise one night a week. I know that the members of the Liberal Party are particularly interested in this: It was so successful, they extended it to three nights a week. We've expanded the children's play area on the upper decks and have singers onshore and offshore. There are native tours with a local carver. These are just some of the useful ideas that have come from local participation in trying to improve service, and that's an important part of the tourism economy for Bruce and for Manitoulin Island.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Under section 37 of our standing orders, I would like to ask for a late show with

the minister on this issue, as he knows the ferry was out of service on at least three occasions.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): You didn't ask the question. You can't have a late show unless you ask a question. New question.

WINDSOR CASINO

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a question of the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. In late May of this year the Ontario Casino Corp put its own project staff on to the permanent casino site in Windsor. Last week we learned that you have called in an outside value-for-money audit to be done by Price Waterhouse at the permanent casino site. There are, as you know, a number of allegations about with respect to the escalating estimated cost to complete the permanent casino site in Windsor.

Officials at the OCC and in your department have indicated that these capital cost increases resulted from the desire of the OCC and Windsor Casino Ltd to make sure the permanent casino site in Windsor remains competitive with the new casinos coming on stream in Detroit.

Given all this, will you release the instructions you have given to the outside auditors? Will you undertake to release their final report?

Hon William Saunderson (Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism): Yes, we certainly will be making the results of the audit known. I think the audit makes a great deal of sense; any audit makes a great deal of sense, for that matter. We want to make sure that the taxpayers are getting good value for their dollar and that money is being spent wisely and correctly.

We have the concern you mentioned that because Michigan last year in the elections voted to have casinos, there would be three casinos built on the Michigan side of the river. Each one of those will be worth roughly $1 billion. We wanted to make sure we enhance our casino in Windsor properly so that we can compete with those new facilities. It just makes good sense to make sure we are competitive when the time comes.

Mr Duncan: We want to be sure that Casino Windsor can be competitive with the Detroit casinos. We want to ensure that the people of Windsor continue to gain the maximum benefit from this development, as do the people of Ontario. It's been alleged that the cost estimates to complete construction have risen from $240 million to $340 million. It is alleged to us that construction, which is well along, has been going on without a signed contract between the OCC and the contractor or between your ministry and the contractor.

Finally, if it is truly your desire to ensure that Casino Windsor remains competitive with Detroit, why have you not responded to the city of Windsor's June 16 resolution with respect to the Western Anchor? Why did you not call auditors in till this point in time when the casino is almost done? How is it that if we want to be competitive, we could allow a situation like this to go on without —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Minister.

Hon Mr Saunderson: Just a little bit of history here: Back in 1994 there was an initial agreement made between the previous government with Windsor Casino Ltd and the Ontario Casino Corp. That agreement was on a cost-plus basis. He probably is aware of that. I'm not sure that cost-plus agreements are always the best types of agreements to make. We have certainly put a cap on any changes that will be made in the future. That's why we have assigned the audit to Price Waterhouse.

I want to say again that we are concerned, as the member is, and it's very good that he is, about protecting the people of Windsor, making sure the jobs are made permanent. There are about 11,000 new jobs from this casino. The revenue to date that has been received from the casino is well over $1 billion. We want to make sure that the taxpayers are well served and that the audit is well performed. It will report in due course and of course we will report at that time.

1510

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. We have an extensive credible and growing list of individuals and groups that are supporting our call for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton. That list includes Hamilton firefighters; local residents; environmentalists; our city council; our regional council; other municipalities such as Oshawa, Ajax, Burlington, Halton, Niagara, Toronto, Frontenac, Cambridge; and three out of four of the MPPs, one of whom happens to be one of your Tory backbenchers.

Minister, what I want to know from you is, who besides you and your officials agrees with your position that there doesn't need to be a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): The government obviously believes that an inquiry into this matter is not necessary, that there hasn't been substantial evidence brought forward to us that an inquiry is needed at the provincial level. I have said to the member before, if the city wants to have an inquiry, God bless them. Have the inquiry. We will cooperate. Most of the issues are dealing with the medical officer of health and the fire department. The medical officer of health is responsible to the regional government. They can have a joint inquiry. Let them go ahead.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): We want an inquiry. You heard him.

Mr Christopherson: Minister, you will appreciate I think that even the most fairminded, objective individual in this province, after listening to the list of groups and the number of issues that have been raised that your government has not been able to answer, wonders exactly what it is you're hiding.

Today it's reported in the Hamilton Spectator and on TV that the International Association of Fire Fighters

based in Washington, DC, are concerned about this because it may affect other communities across North America. They see the importance of holding a public inquiry, but you don't.

Minister, my question to you is this: With you being the only one who knows what's right in this issue — in the whole world you're the only one — I want to know what it is you're hiding. What are you covering up? Why are you afraid of a public inquiry?

Hon Mr Sterling: As I said before — the firefighters, a prime example: city responsibility. If the city wants to have an inquiry, have an inquiry.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr Allan K. McLean (Simcoe East): I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. Recently, the warden of Simcoe county, Mr Jack Hunter, expressed his concerns over the long-term replacement costs for roads recently transferred from provincial jurisdiction to county responsibility. Several mayors in my riding of Simcoe East also echo the concerns for future major expenditure for road replacement or bridge repairs and replacements.

Minister, what contingency plans has your ministry made to assist small municipalities when they find themselves facing prohibitive expenditures for road or bridge repairs?

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for Simcoe East for the question. It certainly helps to have some clarifications.

Local governments are in the best position to deliver and respond to local transportation needs. Highway transfers of roads that serve local traffic are consistent with this approach. The member will also know that Simcoe county will be receiving in compensation the amount of $14.2 million for the highways that will be transferred as of January 1. This dollar figure is made up of three components: an amount that recognizes the present condition of the road; an amount that takes into account the impact on the municipality's particular size of road system; and one year's worth of maintenance.

On top of this, this government is proposing a permanent community reinvestment fund of $500 million to be installed on a yearly basis. This is to help the municipalities that may be affected in a disproportionate transfer of highways.

Mr McLean: In the last election, Premier Harris talked of the importance of maintaining our province's transportation system, which is vital for the movement of goods from rural Ontario to major urban markets. We all know future growth in Ontario will depend heavily on good roads. Minister, have you developed plans to assist the municipalities in planning for maintenance and expanding infrastructure to meet the demands of the economic growth?

Hon Mr Palladini: I believe we have done a lot of things over the last two years to help municipalities manage their own road systems. For example, we have simplified the funding relationship between the provincial government and the municipalities. We have done away with confusing, complicated funding formulas. We have also made room on the property tax so that those dollars that municipalities collect can go back into hard services like roads. For those municipalities receiving transfers, we are providing the five-year compensation dollar amount up front. This will allow them to plan their spending.

The province's role is to maintain the provincial highway system, highways that contribute to the general economy of the province of Ontario. We have spent more on repairing and rehabilitating our provincial highways in each of the last two years than the previous government spent in their mandate.

I believe this has made a difference in the economy. In the past two years, I believe this government has been responsible for creating at least over 200,000 jobs back into the economy.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. During your response a few minutes ago to the member for Hamilton Centre, the Premier said, "We want an inquiry." That came from your Premier; Hansard picked it up. The Premier said, "We want an inquiry" into Plastimet. So now the Premier has added his voice to those of your backbencher the member for Hamilton Mountain, the member for Hamilton Centre, the community groups and the firefighters.

Minister, there's a problem here: Nobody trusts you. Nobody trusts your government on this issue. Nobody trusts the answer you're giving people. It comes down to a simple question here: You are afraid to call a public inquiry. I've submitted 238 questions; you have not answered one of them yet. You are afraid. You are scared that a public inquiry is going to show very clearly that you've been negligent and your ministry has been negligent in handling the Plastimet scenario.

You don't give a damn about firefighters; you don't give a damn about the people of Hamilton. You're discriminating against Hamiltonians. If this fire had occurred in one of your 905-belt areas, had it occurred in Burlington or Oshawa, you would have called an inquiry. Why are you practising environmental discrimination against the people of Hamilton by refusing to call a public inquiry?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): I think the Premier was responding to my response in saying to the other member from Hamilton that if you want to have an inquiry, if the city of Hamilton, who have said they want —

Mr Agostino: It is your responsibility. You are ducking.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Hamilton East, I've warned you three times. I name the member for Hamilton East, Mr Agostino.

Mr Agostino was escorted from the chamber.

Hon Mr Sterling: Many politicians at the provincial and municipal level, in response to a very unfortunate incident for the people of Hamilton, have turned to the fact that an inquiry is going to solve all of the problems. My ministry is on the site, cleaning up the site. They've been providing information to the people of Hamilton, information which has been accurate, information which has been good, in order to allow the fire officials and the medical officer of health to make the right decisions.

As I said before, I don't believe that an inquiry will prove anything or do anything for anybody. However, if the city of Hamilton and the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth want an inquiry, they can do it under their legislation. I invite them, I implore them, to have the inquiry they're demanding.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition concerns Bill 160 and is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas we cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents, teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down" — won't back down, won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature to this petition.

1520

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I've a petition from constituents of mine in downtown Hamilton. It reads as follows:

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

I gladly and proudly add my name to theirs.

CHILD CARE

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 19 people.

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, draw the attention of the Legislature of Ontario to the following:

"That managing the family home and caring for infants and preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society and deserves respect and support;

"That child care policies and funding should provide equity and fairness to all Ontario families;

"Therefore, your petitioners call upon the Legislature,

"(a) to pursue policy and funding initiatives that will support a full range of child care choices, such as extending the child care tax credit to all families, including those providing full-time parental care; and

"(b) to pursue discussions with the federal government to review the tax system to find ways to assist two-parent families where one parent chooses to remain at home."

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health had started to charge seniors and social assistance recipients a $2 user fee for each prescription filled on July 15, 1996; and

"Whereas seniors on a fixed income do not significantly benefit from the income tax savings created by this user fee copayment or from other non-health user fees; and

"Whereas the perceived savings to health care from the $2 copayment fee will not compensate for the suffering and misery caused by this user fee or the painstaking task involved to fill out the application forms; and

"Whereas the current Ontario Minister of Health, Jim Wilson, promised as an opposition MPP in a July 5, 1993, letter to the Ontario pharmacists that his party would not endorse legislation that will punish patients to the detriment of health care in Ontario,

"We, the undersigned Ontario residents, strongly urge the government to repeal this user fee plan because the tax-saving user fee concept is not fair, sensitive or accessible to low-income or fixed-income seniors and, lest we forget, our province's seniors have paid their dues by collectively contributing to the social, economic, moral and political fabric of Canada."

I affix my signature to this because I fully agree with it.

SCHOOL PRAYERS

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): A petition to the province of Ontario:

"The Grand Orange Lodge of Ontario, signed by Madoc Lodge 1193, being a firm supporter of the public system and the Protestant faith, does with the undersigned hereby petition the government of Ontario to reinstate the Lord's Prayer in the public school system of Ontario."

STANDING ORDERS REFORM

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): I have a very important petition here that deals with the so-called standing orders reform —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): You may explain it or read it, one or the other.

Mr Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It states:

"Whereas the people of Ontario want rigorous discussion on legislation dealing with public policy issues like health care, education and care for seniors; and

"Whereas many people in Ontario believe that the Mike Harris government is moving too quickly and recklessly, creating havoc with the provision of quality health care and quality education; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has passed new legislative rules which have eroded the ability of both the public and the media to closely scrutinize the actions of the Ontario government; and

"Whereas Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, when they were in opposition, defended the rights of the opposition and used the rules to their full advantage when they believed it was necessary to slow down the passage of controversial legislation; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has now reduced the amount of time that MPPs have to debate the important issues of today; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government, through its rule changes, has diminished the role of elected members of the Legislative Assembly, who are, after all, accountable to the people who elect them, and instead has chosen to concentrate power in the Premier's office in the hands of people who are not elected officials;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, call upon Mike Harris to withdraw his draconian rule changes and restore rules which promote rigorous debate on contentious issues and hold the government accountable to the people of Ontario."

I've signed it as well, and I'm handing it over to Lee Ann right now.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 40 people.

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to appear topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass a bill empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I'd like to present a petition in regard to Bill 160. It reads:

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas we cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I agree wholeheartedly with the sentiments and with the petitioners and I gladly affix my signature to this petition.

COURT DECISION

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I'm pleased to bring forward a petition from about 100 people from the United Brethren in Christ Church in Fort Erie on Garrison Road. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Court of Appeal has ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the federal government has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to continue to urge the government of Canada to enact legislation to ban going topless in public places."

I have signed my signature to it in agreement.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Windsor-Essex county was the first community to undergo hospital restructuring; and

"Whereas the community supported the recommendations of the Win-Win report based on a funding model that included the expansion of community-based care; and

"Whereas recent reports estimate that Windsor-Essex hospitals are underfunded by approximately $122 per person; and

"Whereas this represents the lowest funding per capita for hospital services of any community in Ontario with a population over 200,000; and

"Whereas hospitals across the province have been forced to further reduce expenditures 18%; and

"Whereas these cuts have forced hospitals to eliminate emergency services in the west end of Windsor and cut desperately needed services; and

"Whereas the minister acknowledged the additional funding was necessary in high-growth areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister of Health to provide the appropriate level of funding to hospitals in Windsor-Essex which would allow Windsor Regional Hospital to provide urgent care services for the west-end community and to restore equitable health care funding across Windsor and Essex county."

I affix my signature along with hundreds of others from my community to this petition.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has announced its intentions of dumping the financing for ambulances, social housing and public health care services on to the backs of municipalities; and

"Whereas this irresponsible action will create a shortfall of more than $42 million for local governments in St Catharines and the Niagara region; and

"Whereas local representatives in St Catharines and the Niagara region will be forced to either raise property taxes by as much as $200 per household or cut services; and

"Whereas Mike Harris called municipal representatives whiners when they tried to explain to him that his proposal was unfair and would create gaps in important services such as the delivery of public health care services; and

"Whereas the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing accused local representatives of being opportunistic simply because they attempted to point out that the Mike Harris proposal was unfair and primarily designed to fund his ill-advised tax scheme; and

"Whereas the Harris government refuses to listen to the representatives, who work most closely with their constituents;

"We, the undersigned, call on the Mike Harris government to scrap its downloading plan, which will cause either an increase in property taxes or an unacceptable cut to important local services."

I affix my signature, as I'm in full agreement with the petition.

1530

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas we cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and to be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature to this petition.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Windsor-Essex county was the first community to undergo hospital restructuring; and

"Whereas the community supported the recommendations of the Win-Win report based on a funding model that included the expansion of community-based care; and

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"Whereas hospitals across the province have been forced to further reduce expenditures 18%; and

"Whereas the minister acknowledged that additional funding was necessary in high-growth areas; and

"Whereas these cuts have forced hospitals to eliminate emergency services in the west end of Windsor and cut desperately needed services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister of Health to provide the appropriate level of health care funding to hospitals in Windsor-Essex which would allow Windsor Regional Hospital to provide urgent care services for the west-end community and to restore equitable health care funding across Windsor and Essex county."

I join hundreds of my fellow citizens in signing this petition.

TVONTARIO

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas TVOntario has served Ontarians of all ages for more than 25 years with quality non-commercial television that continues to focus 70% of its programming on education and children's programming; and

"Whereas TVOntario is available to 97.4% of Ontarians and for some uncabled communities is the only station available, making it a truly provincial asset; and

"Whereas TVOntario continues to work towards increasing self-generated revenues;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to ensure that TVOntario continue to be a publicly owned and funded educational broadcaster."

This is signed by a number of my constituents, mostly from the Elliot Lake and Spanish areas.

OPPOSITION DAY

RENT REGULATION

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I move that:

Whereas the Mike Harris government has introduced Bill 96, the so-called Tenant Protection Act, that will gut rent controls in Ontario, raise tenants' rents and make it easier to demolish their homes; and

Whereas Bill 96 is only part of the Conservatives' attack on affordable housing that includes cancelling over 390 non-profit housing projects and dumping the massive cost of social housing on to Ontario municipalities; and

Whereas tenants across the province have denounced Bill 96 during public hearings; and

Whereas the Tory-dominated legislative committee refused to support Liberal amendments that would have maintained strong tenant protections; and

Whereas during the York South by-election in May 1996 Mike Harris promised that "rent control will continue" and that "tenant protection will be improved under the Mike Harris government"; and

Whereas Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has committed to scrapping Bill 96 and replacing it with meaningful rent controls;

Therefore, this House calls on the Mike Harris government to stop its attack on affordable housing and to immediately withdraw Bill 96, the Tenant Protection Act.

We have begun to debate not just rent control through this resolution but an entire affordable housing policy. I want to begin by using part of my time to talk about Bill 96, a bill that the government has called the Tenant Protection Act but which we know is the tenant rejection act, a bill that takes away fundamental protections afforded tenants.

I want to speak first to the issues, the response we've had to that bill and why it's important to have rent controls.

In this country, in this province, we regulate everything from the price of water, the price of utilities, the price of telephones, the price of cable television, yet this government says we ought not to be regulating rent; we ought not to be prepared as a society to ensure that tenants, many of whom spend more than 30% of their income to keep a roof over their heads — we ought not to protect them. That's what this government says. Instead, they have brought in a bill that they have tried to say or convince or camouflage as rent control. In fact what it is is vacancy decontrol.

Let me explain to the government members how that works. The government proposes that once an apartment unit becomes vacant, the landlord and the prospective tenant or the landlord alone can decide on a new rent which will then be subject to rent control. But that's where the bill fails. That's where the bill deals with what we call discounts. So what happens? A unit becomes vacant, the landlord raises the new rent to some astronomically high figure and then brings back the rent to some discounted level which will allow him or her to effectively escape the provisions of the guideline increases that the government has said will continue.

It is the position of the official opposition that rent control is appropriate in our economy, that the housing market ought to be regulated, and it is the position of the official opposition that when given the opportunity we will withdraw Bill 96 and introduce meaningful rent controls once again in Ontario.

I remind you that Bill 96 replaces six pieces of legislation: the Rent Control Act, the Landlord and Tenant Act, the Rental Housing Protection Act, the Municipal Amendment Act, the Residents' Rights Act and the Land Lease Statute Law Amendment Act.

This bill deals with a whole range of tenant and landlord issues. We proposed some 80 amendments, as I recall. I acknowledge that the government accepted two of those amendments, relatively minor in nature. They were amendments that we put forward to further debate, frankly, and we were quite astounded that the government took two of those minor amendments.

When we talk about housing issues, in addition to Bill 96 let's talk about some of the other things the government has done. They have cancelled all funding for new non-profit units in this province. That's half a billion dollars over four years

They've announced their intention to download responsibility for social housing to municipalities. Think about that. Think about the total cost of that and what it will do to property taxes.

1540

This is the government that, in the view of the official opposition, is the government of increasing property taxes. It is the government that will raise taxes on homeowners from Windsor to Ottawa and throughout this entire province. Whether you live in an urban area or whether you

live in a rural area, this is the government of increased property taxes.

Downloading social housing is a mistake. Social housing ought to remain a provincial responsibility. We believe the province should have responsibility for funding social housing in Ontario. We also believe and support the notion that municipalities can provide better and more effective administration, but clearly the funding of social housing ought to remain a provincial responsibility.

The government has also cut welfare allowances by 22%, directly impacting on the ability of the most vulnerable in our society to afford basic shelter. I remind members of the government that 30% of tenants are on welfare.

Finally, they've ended all rent-geared-to-income support.

To add insult to injury, they've cut the maintenance and capital budget of the Ontario Housing Corp by over $100 million. Now we see experimental projects going on in Regent Park and in the Glengarry units in Windsor that could eventually lead to a program of shelter allowance, which is contemplated in the Common Sense Revolution.

We think a government ought to have a clearer vision of providing affordable housing. The government will argue that the stock of rental housing will increase as a result of its Bill 96. We argue that the stock of available rental units will go up, but the stock of available affordable units will go down. Yet again we have a policy, we have a policy framework that penalizes the most vulnerable in our society in order to create a market condition which government members argue will create additional housing for those in a position to afford it.

It's interesting when you read what the demographers tell you. They tell you that at the turn of the century we will need more, not less, affordable housing. Demand for rental units in the affordable category will increase. We heard compelling testimony throughout hearings on this particular bill that it will in fact reduce the amount of affordable housing and leave tenants exposed unnecessarily to market variances, market problems.

We should say, as an official opposition, that there are changes needed. There were changes needed in the area of landlord-tenant relations. There were issues that we addressed completely in committee that any government ought to have addressed: the better administration, the more efficient flow of dispute resolution. Indeed we supported the government in some of those areas and proposed a number of amendments of our own that would have ensured that the government not shirk its responsibility with respect to a more efficient processing of these differences.

We've debated this in the Legislature but we want to say it again today, and we'll say it again in third reading debate, that vacancy decontrol means the slow death of rent controls. Approximately 20% of all apartment units will become vacant in any given calendar year. Over five years, you will go through a complete cycle. As I say, when you couple that with the government's desire to allow discounting of rent, you effectively and completely eliminate rent controls in the province of Ontario.

We've said and argued, and the government has acknowledged, that there will be an increase in tenant harassment by landlords. You can see it in their own bill. They've provided new mechanisms in order to try and protect tenants from this kind of harassment, mechanisms which we said will not work.

Rent control is not a draconian policy that unduly stagnates a market. Rent control is a policy that protects the most vulnerable. Changes to the system of dispute resolution in the Landlord and Tenant Act were overdue, and we proposed our own changes to that system that would make it more efficient. But the bottom line is, there's a place for meaningful rent controls in this province.

The important thing for all of us to remember is that, particularly in those large urban centres, the government must look out for the interests of tenants, tenants who spend a significant portion of their income in order to afford their units. It is incumbent on any government to stand behind tenants and ensure that rent increases are fair, to ensure that balance exists between landlords and tenants. The Davis government, the Peterson government, the Rae government all have endorsed the principles, although there have been differences in the implementation. We see this government backtracking entirely.

We say withdraw Bill 96. Withdraw it today. Let's install a system of meaningful rent control that protects the interests of tenants and will allow for the proper resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants. If the government doesn't, the Liberal government in 1999 will repeal Bill 96 and reinstitute a system of meaningful rent controls in the province of Ontario.

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I'm absolutely delighted to be here to address the motion of the member for Windsor-Walkerville. This is a very important issue in my riding of Oriole.

With that in mind, I would like to speak to two groups in particular in this debate: certainly the residents of Oriole, but also the youth of this province, the youth who expressed their concerns, who went to the hearings and made presentations. Unfortunately, it seems that the government was not listening to the presentations they made.

In Oriole, 48% of the residents are tenants. In fact, last week I was at the annual general meeting of the Oriole community advisory committee. Not one person, not one tenant, because they all were tenants, had a good word to say about Bill 96, the so-called Tenant Protection Act. Their message was that this act should be scrapped. Their message was that the government should withdraw Bill 96 immediately. I'm very pleased to be here to send that message, to be the voice of that group and to support my good friend from Windsor-Walkerville in his efforts in this regard.

The message in the by-election was very clear: Bill 96 offered tenants no protections and they want it withdrawn in favour of real rent control and real tenant protections. Six different acts — not solely financial, but also rights, human rights that people enjoy — are being changed by Bill 96 and it is just utterly wrong.

The concerns were many. I heard that landlords will be able to raise rents without restriction when a unit becomes vacant. This effectively makes tenants prisoners in their own homes.

I'd like to tell you the story of a woman who lives in Oriole. She has a very modest one-bedroom apartment. She pays $600 a month for rent. She unfortunately is disabled and receives $450 for rent from family benefits. She can't face further rent increases. She can't afford to move after January 1 because rent controls are effectively removed. The government must protect all citizens in Ontario. It is an absolute tragedy waiting to happen, and I hope that all members will have the good sense to support this resolution and prevent situations like this from occurring.

There is real fear among tenants that they will be open to intimidation and harassment from their landlords to move out or to be moved into substandard apartments because they will not be able to find affordable rental accommodation elsewhere. This is particularly true in Metropolitan Toronto, where there is a very low vacancy rate.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has said that this will spur the creation of new rental housing stock. I can tell you that is a myth that is easily shattered because, as the minister and the members well know, anything built after 1974 was exempt from rent controls. The opportunity has always been there, and so you must ask yourselves again, why is Bill 96 being proposed by this government? It is clear that it is just an assault on tenants. Even the government agrees that there will be harassment. They've created this anti-harassment bureau and they've raised fines when tenants are being harassed.

1550

I share the concerns of the Ontario Human Rights Commissioner, Keith Norton, a former minister in past Tory governments, that this bill sets aside provisions of the Ontario Human Rights Code that protects tenants from discrimination by landlords. Tenants in Oriole do not like the fact that under the new law, landlords will be able to enter your premises without notice to show the premises; will be able to enter your home without telling you, without prior knowledge. That is fundamentally against the commonest decency that we expect from anyone in our society.

Tenants are concerned that the bill removes almost all protections they had against their homes being turned into condominiums or being demolished at the whim of the landlord.

Finally, tenants in Oriole are concerned that their rents will skyrocket because of the new allowable increases for extraordinary operating expenses such as property tax increases, Hydro rate increases, direct results of legislation — Bill 106 and Bill 149 of this government — which will be felt most in Metropolitan Toronto. No tenant can be assured of what their rent will be from year to year.

I also want the chance to speak on behalf of some of the youth groups that came to the hearings and made their voices known and heard. I hope that the members of the Legislature will hear and respond to the concerns and support this resolution. The Ontario wing of the Canadian Federation of Students summed up the concerns of our university tenants quite well when they indicated at the hearings:

"...this bill heavily favours landlords and does little to protect tenant rights and, more importantly, affordable housing. Students will be greatly impacted by any increases to rents. The effects have great spinoff effects for the accessibility of post-secondary education."

Students know that if you move every year, landlords raise the rents every year. This makes affordable housing less accessible every year.

What did other youth groups say during the Bill 96 hearings? The Touchstone Youth Centre brought its concerns about the amendments to the Human Rights Code to the legislative committee. They wanted to stress that this law will affect youths who are already in crisis: youths who are facing family breakdowns, youths who have been evicted and fleeing violence and abuse. They wanted to tell the government that their resources to support these youths are stretched to the limits. It is critical that youth be admitted to shelter as soon as possible. They said:

"Given how many youth have already been turned away from support services" — as a direct result of actions of this government — "such as emergency shelters, I'm here to put out a compassionate request that you take into consideration that...our youth, who do not have access to references, to first and last months' rent, to the use of credit cards, and who are renting for the first time, will not be excluded."

Silence, deafening silence. Unfortunately then as now, I can tell, the government and the government committee members did not listen.

Finally, let me refer the members of this House to the presentation of the Kensington Youth Theatre and Employment Skills program, or KYTES. This group serves youths 16 to 24 years old who have primarily lived on the streets or in shelters. This group has tried to help them make a transition towards full participation in our society. KYTES came to the hearing to appeal to the members of the committee because they have a concern about the central importance of stable housing in the lives of troubled young people. They had a real concern about access to affordable rental conditions. They said to the committee:

"Every young person who goes out at one point, whether to leave home or with parents' okay or whether they leave home with parents' curses, is going to be facing new apartments. They're going to be the first ones with the fewest resources on average and they're going to be, quite frankly, sons and daughters of people around this room. Whether you can supply them with cash or not, lots of other young people are going to be striding out there without a shot at a decent place."

It's absolutely mind-boggling that this government, the members of this government and the members of the committee, refused, absolutely refused to hear the words of the representatives of youth in Ontario.

For the reasons I've outlined prior, for the reasons and the voices I heard during the by-election in Oriole, I am absolutely delighted to have stood with our leader, Dalton McGuinty, and have announced that a Liberal government will scrap Bill 96 and restore real tenant protection in Ontario. Thank you very much.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): It is a pleasure to be able to speak on the opposition day motion in the name of Mr Duncan. It makes reference to Bill 96, the so-called Tenant Protection Act. It refers to the provisions of that bill. It says that this bill is going to gut rent controls in Ontario, raise tenants' rents, make it easier to demolish their homes, and that it's only part of the Conservative government's attack on affordable housing here in Ontario. That is something I agree with. That's what this bill does.

It calls itself a Tenant Protection Act, but we know that this is another example of Tory legislation that says one thing in the title but within the body of the legislation means something completely different. It's quite obvious that this isn't a bill that is going to protect tenants; this is really a bill that is going to protect landlords. It's going to protect the big-money friends of the provincial Progressive Conservative government: landlords, developers. Those are the people who are going to be protected by this bill. This has been something that has been brought up time and time again at the committee hearings by representative after representative.

This government says they are listening — ha. We've made the point over and over again that this is a government that is moving too far, too fast and in the wrong direction and that they are not listening. People are saying that they don't want this pace of change, they don't want this direction, and hopefully this is a government that is listening.

We've seen them take some steps after they've listened recently with respect to Bill 136. But if they were listening to tenants in this province they would withdraw Bill 96 and restore or ensure that tenants receive the protection of the rent control bill that the NDP government brought in when they were in government. That was legislation that was brought in by the then Minister of Housing, Dave Cooke I think it was, the member for Windsor-Riverside, as a matter of fact.

Part of the reason he introduced the legislation that he did was because Windsor-Riverside is an area made up of a great number of tenants. They live in places like Seaway Tower, Bayview Towers, in apartment buildings along Wyandotte Street East and also in an area known as Meadowbrook near Lauzon and Tecumseh Road.

During the by-election campaign that ended on September 4 I had an opportunity to speak to many tenants in those buildings and they expressed to me their concerns about what may happen if this Bill 96 passes. Many of them were seniors, people who were on fixed incomes, single moms, people who were having a difficult time paying the rent as it was but thought that landlords were going to try and take steps to get them to leave their homes so they could boost the rents up and rent to someone else.

1600

We'll see an escalation of rents in areas like Windsor-Riverside so that people who are unable to afford the rent after it goes up will be faced with the choice of not having a place to live. That's basically the choice they're going to have. What is it they would be able to do?

During the by-election campaign tenants especially and electors generally make up their minds about what they felt about Bill 96, the Tenant Protection Act, and they voted no to that bill. It was an easy choice for them. They recognized this was a bill that was only going to help developers; it wasn't going to help tenants. They said no to Mike Harris' rent control bill, and they were faced then with the choice between supporting a Liberal candidate or an NDP candidate.

They, of course, supported the NDP because they remember back before 1990 when the Liberal rent control bill was in place. They remember the double-digit rent increases that took place then. They recall that financing costs were going to be able to be passed through to landlords who flipped their buildings over and over again. They recognized there was no prohibition on increasing rents for landlords who didn't maintain or improve their buildings. They remembered the useless luxury renovations that were done and new appliances that were purchased so that the rents would be able to be escalated artificially. They remember that sort of rent control that was in place under the Liberal government in the past.

If I have any concern with respect to the resolution that is before us today, it's the Liberal leader, Dalton McGuinty's commitment to replace Bill 96 with meaningful rent control. If Dalton McGuinty is saying meaningful rent control meaning the rent control they had in place during the Liberal government before 1990 — and I hope that's not what they mean — that's not something the NDP members here are going to be able to support. I really hope we can get some clarification with respect to that.

I do share the concerns of the Liberal members, and I'm sure my colleagues, with respect to Bill 96 and how this is going to hurt tenants in Ontario. I'm happy I've been given this opportunity to speak on behalf of tenants here in their opposition to Bill 96.

Mr Harry Danford (Hastings-Peterborough): It's also my pleasure to participate in today's opposition day debate on rent control. Since our election in June 1995, our government has undertaken a lengthy study of this issue and our goal is twofold: It is to make the rent control system fairer for the tenants and to increase the amount of rental stock that is available in Ontario.

It's important that we look at the state of rental accommodation in Ontario today. Over 60% of existing housing stock is 25 years old or more and this proportion is expected to grow, as there have been fewer additions to the rental stock since the late 1970s.

I would like to also add that the building of new rental accommodation has almost ground to a halt, with only 37 new rental units coming on the market in Toronto last year. Across Ontario private investment in new rental

housing has declined to a very low level. From an average of over 26,000 units annually in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, private rental starts have declined to fewer than 2,000 annually in the past few years.

This has led to a tightening of the vacancy rate in many Ontario rental markets. For example, the vacancy rate in Toronto is less than 1%; to be precise it is 0.8% and it's expected to decline. However, in other markets such as Ottawa an oversupply in the rental housing market has meant landlords actually offer incentives such as gifts or even as much as three free months' rent to entice tenants into their buildings.

What rental stock is available is in need of some pretty major repairs. We found this through the consultations, and it was voiced by many people who participated: the deterioration of the concrete balconies; certainly the garages were in a deplorable state. In fact, a tenants' survey done by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. concludes that 11% of the rental buildings need substantial work. An estimate by the Fair Rental Policy Organization puts the current cost of repairing major structural problems at $10 billion. It was clear that something had to be done.

In 1996 the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing released a white paper on rent that formed the basis for committee hearings last summer. Our committee travelled around the province hearing many different views and certainly many different opinions. Tenants and landlords alike from across the province told us that the current rent control system needs to be fixed.

Tenants feel that the system is too confusing, that buildings are poorly maintained and that they already pay too much rent. While they like the protection provided by the current rent control system and in fact would even like an even stricter system, they know that many changes are needed to fix problems in maintenance, rental vacancies and the dispute resolution system. Landlords and developers also know the system is broken, and will not invest in new rental housing unless it is changed and the rules are loosened.

We need to find a compromise, and I believe that Bill 96 does that. Using the results of the committee hearings, the minister drafted the present tenant protection legislation, Bill 96. We believe the current system of rent control does not work for landlords or tenants and needs to be fixed. The housing stock is run down and maintenance is poor. The system is too complex for both tenants and landlords. No one is served well by the current system.

Our bill will continue to make sure that tenants are protected against unfair rent increases. The current rent control guideline formula for sitting tenants will be retained. Increases above the guideline will be capped at 4% for capital expenditures. Tenants will be able to make rent reduction applications for situations such as the withdrawal of services by a landlord, serious maintenance problems. An amendment adopted at the committee will make automatic a rent reduction due to an extraordinary decrease in operating costs as a result of the changes that could be effected by a decrease in municipal taxes, one of the problems that was clearly mentioned at many of the hearings.

Also during those hearings, we heard that tenants wanted maintenance provisions improved. We have given property standards officers more powers to have a property inspected by a qualified expert when an owner does not provide sufficient information. Our system gives landlords incentive to invest in their buildings and is tough on those who don't take care of them. If landlords don't do needed repairs, the fines will be tougher, and the enforcement of the fines will be easier to impose.

Tenants told us they wanted security of tenure and to maintain existing rights and responsibilities. No changes will be made to the reasons for evictions or formal notice periods for most tenancies. A tenant cannot be evicted except for certain reasons as set out in the legislation. Bill 96 has stronger provisions to prohibit landlords from harassing tenants as well. The package contains an increase in the maximum fines given to landlords who do harass and an enforcement unit will be established to investigate and lay charges in harassment cases.

For the first time, landlords and tenants can negotiate the rent charged on vacant units. By giving tenants and landlords the power to negotiate the amount of rent charged when a vacant unit is re-rented, the proposed tenant protection package allows the markets to set rents and encourages active participation in the process.

We set out to change the current rent control system so it was easier to understand and not as costly. Currently we pay approximately $18 million to run a system that doesn't work well. Our new system will be cheaper, faster, and above all, fairer. It's a system that both tenants and landlords can understand and will produce results quickly. Under Bill 96, landlord-tenant disputes will be moved out of the courts and through an administrative body to streamline the dispute process.

Our tenant protection package protects tenants from unfair rent increases and evictions without just cause. It improves apartment maintenance and is tough on landlords who don't take care of their buildings. It encourages people to build rental real estate and it streamlines the administration and cuts the red tape.

We have a package which we believe is better for both the landlord and the tenant. During our consultations the message was very clear: that the present legislation was not working. With the implementation of Bill 96, we will have a tenant protection package that we believe will improve the quality of housing needs in Ontario.

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Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): I'm pleased to stand in this House today and speak on the motion moved by my colleague the member for Windsor-Walkerville. Rent control is a matter affecting real lives and real people in a very significant way. Today we are dealing with a basic human need, the need for shelter.

Rental shelter is a very important issue not only in my riding of Ottawa West, as I can affirm from the recent by-election, but in the region of Ottawa-Carleton as well. Rental housing is about 46% of all the housing in Ottawa-

Carleton and the highest proportion of any city in Ontario. It includes over 120,000 dwellings, home to over 300,000 people in the region — men, women and children — who are tenants. Of the 33,000 homes in my own riding, over half, 56% or 18,000 units, are rentals. They are home to seniors, young families and single mothers. These are people largely from low-income categories who cannot afford the changes being proposed by the government's new rent control legislation, Bill 96.

Housing affordability is an important issue in Ottawa-Carleton, particularly for tenants. Between 1990 and 1995, according to CMHC, average rents increased in Ottawa-Carleton between 16% and 20%, depending on unit type, all within legal rent control limits. Yet at the same time the consumer price index increased by only 12.8%. Further, the number of tenants with housing affordability problems, defined as paying 30% or more of their gross annual income on shelter, has steadily increased in the region since 1981, from about 25% of all-tenant households to nearly 29% in 1991.

Of all the households in Ottawa-Carleton with housing affordability problems, nearly two thirds are rental households. For those who had to pay more than 50% of their income on shelter, nearly three quarters were tenants. Further, about three quarters of the social assistance recipients in Ottawa-Carleton live in private-market housing, making up 40%, or 39,000 households, in private rental housing. Affordability clearly is a problem here in Ottawa-Carleton, particularly given this government's 21.6% cut in welfare rates.

To underline the problem, Ottawa-Carleton also has its share of people living below the poverty line. I use the example of Statistics Canada's low-income cutoffs. Ottawa-Carleton's share of poverty comes to about 94,000 people, according to the 1991 census, or nearly a third of the renting population. This means that for a low-income individual, a person who would be receiving, say, $14,000 as an annual income, his or her affordable monthly rent would be $350; for a couple whose annual income was $19,000, the affordable monthly rent would be about $480 or less; and for a four-person low-income family with an annual income of about $28,000, the affordable monthly rent would be $700 or less. Considering that one-bedroom apartments in Ottawa-Carleton start at $600 a month, this means that most of the 94,000 low-income people in Ottawa-Carleton, who are overwhelmingly renters, have a housing affordability problem.

Recently the regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton published a series of staff reports on housing in the region. These reports state that there's clearly a crisis in rental housing in Ottawa-Carleton. The problem lies with affordability of rental housing, not in land supply. Ottawa-Carleton has over 3,000 hectares of available urban land capable of supporting 89,000 residential units. Regional staff project that 5,700 residential units will be required each year from 1996 to the year 2011, and 46%, or about 2,600, will be new rental units. The question is how to achieve affordability of this housing. Unfortunately the provisions contained in the government's Bill 96 go in the wrong direction.

The primary problem is vacancy decontrol. This is the government's proposal that when a rental unit is vacated, the landlord will negotiate the incoming tenant's rent without regulatory restrictions. Rent control guidelines will apply once the unit has been re-rented to the new tenant. However, the government's own studies show that each year between 20% and 25% of tenants move and that within five years 70% of rental housing will have changed tenants, therefore changing rents. This means that under the government's Bill 96, rent control is effectively ended for most of the rental market over a relatively short time. To compound the problem, rent controls will not apply to any new rental housing construction. Simply put, tenants in Ottawa-Carleton, as well as the rest of the province, can't afford this.

Tenants move for all kinds of reasons, not all of them voluntary, and the effect of these proposals would exacerbate an already difficult affordability problem for renters in Ottawa-Carleton. Lifting rent controls as apartments vacate, which is the Harris government's plan, provides no protection for an historically mobile and vulnerable population, particularly those with modest and low incomes. It sentences renters to their apartments and provides incentives to landlords to turn over the tenants in their units to achieve market rents. This will certainly create additional stress to the landlord-tenant relationship, particularly as repairs and service maintenance become negotiable under the government's proposals.

Another problem with the Harris plan for rent controls is what paying for repairs and maintenance does to tenants. Currently the rent control guideline is set at about 2.8% in excess of inflation, which is running at less that 2%. Part of the government's justification for the larger figure is to finance repairs and maintenance. If this was honestly so, then these funds would be directed to capital reserves for these purposes and such expenditures financed from those reserves. This would ensure transparency and integrity to the rent increase and should cover the 4% rent increase for major capital expenditures as well.

Yet Bill 96 removes the requirement for the calculation of capital expenditures to be adjusted for costs no longer borne. This means that rent increases to pay for specific improvements will continue indefinitely, creating a windfall rent increase to the landlord in excess of what it was originally granted for. This is simply unjustifiable. You ought not to pay twice or more for the same thing. To retain this feature in this bill is grossly unfair to tenants and clearly shows the Harris government's bias.

The bad news for tenants continues in Mike Harris's Ontario. In Bill 96 the ability for tenants to claim rent rebates for inadequate maintenance and to freeze rent increases when there is an outstanding civic property standards order on the property has been abolished, despite the fact that it has been very effective in resolving outstanding repairs. The government attempts in this bill

to offer a sop to tenants by increasing fines for landlord harassment, but it won't help tenants much.

First, it requires a considerable effort and investment by the tenant to initiate such a case. In fact, few cases are ever initiated under the currently existing legislation. Second, it is already difficult to prove intent. Third, the fines awarded under this section have been historically insignificant. Fourth, it simply creates a business case for the landlord who wishes to turn over his or her building to achieve market rents. It is truly an empty gesture and, when combined with the government's proposal to establish a new anti-harassment enforcement unit, clearly shows it was designed to compensate for vacancy decontrol and merely highlights the problems that vacancy decontrol will create for existing tenants.

Bill 96 changes the focus of tenant protection legislation from protecting tenants' access to affordable units to protecting tenants only when they're lucky enough to be in an affordable unit. It protects the sitting tenant, not rental units. It is quite frankly wrong, as the loss of affordable and accessible rental housing reduces choice and exacerbates an already difficult renting situation in Ottawa-Carleton.

Conversion of rental housing to local ownership has been a major factor in the loss of affordable rental housing in Ottawa-Carleton in recent years. We have lost over 5,000 town homes from our rental stock between 1989 and 1994. Renovations are not the issue here, as one of the previous members alluded to, as Ottawa-Carleton's housing stock is relatively young, with over 87% built since 1946, nearly a quarter since 1981. According to the 1991 census, only about 6% of our housing stock is in need of major repairs.

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If there's anything in this bill that clearly shows the government's ignorance, to put it charitably, of the real world many tenants live in, particularly those on low incomes, it's the new provision that violates the human rights of tenants by permitting landlords to ask for income-related information as part of the rental application. The rule that will come into play is that rent should not exceed 30% of anyone's gross income, instead of simply ability to pay. Yet, as I said earlier, in Ottawa-Carleton nearly 30% of renters fall within that category. That's 90,000 people. How can this government put their shelter at risk like this?

This is why Bill 96 must be scrapped. It creates hardships for tenants, it bleeds rent control to death unit by unit and it makes a mockery of tenant protection. It doesn't protect tenants from higher rents and it does reduce the supply of affordable rental housing. It's a bad piece of legislation and, as the tenants of Ottawa West have clearly told me in a recent by-election, it must go.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): I am pleased to have a short time to be able to speak to this motion by the member for Windsor-Walkerville. I want to speak first to some other matters that I think pertain to this motion and then get to the bill. On any given night here in Metropolitan Toronto, particularly Toronto — because as you know, in North York they don't have any homeless people at all; we heard that from the mayor-to-be — we have approximately 5,000 people who have no place to call home. Some of these men and women sleep in shelters, in hostels, in church basements, in air vents that are hot obviously, in bus shelters, under the Gardiner Expressway. That's in my riding and I see them all the time as I drive down Bathurst. Sometimes these people die of exposure. They do die.

Until now, we used to have governments, provincial and federal, that provided money for hundreds and thousands of low-income people, who sometimes join the ranks of the homeless. I think by the pressure put on governments over a long period of time they have taken on the role and social responsibility to build housing stock that is able to house the homeless and also people on low income, and there are many in this province and in this city.

Now, whereas governments used to build homes and also provide subsidies, we see these guys, this government, pass laws and policies that reduce the affordable and accessible housing stock and in fact make it impossible to construct private apartment buildings in some ways, although these people claim they're going to help out.

In Metropolitan Toronto they're scrambling to deal with the housing crisis that this government is throwing us in. They are being dumped on with the responsibility for social housing, the Metro housing authority, the Metro housing company, non-profit homes, co-ops. They're given that responsibility now to deal with the crisis. Frankly, I don't think they know what they're going to do, because the money isn't there. It's a crisis that is being brought to the municipalities across Ontario, but in particular in Metro, by the federal Liberal government and by these people over here, these other guys, these Tory types over here, who are the other major disaster for people looking for affordable homes.

If you look at the federal Liberal government, what have they done? They have frozen their contribution to public housing to the rates of 1995-96, and indeed they no longer build or help to build affordable housing. In fact, these fine Liberals at the federal level are getting out of the housing field. They don't want any more responsibility for housing. They're trying to sign some deals, as they already have done with Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories and Newfoundland. They've got deals with these people, because they want to get out of the housing field — no different than these Tories. That's the Liberals at the federal level — hostile governments against people who are in serious need of help.

These Tories are driving people out of work, because they're firing the entire civil service, impoverishing a hell of a lot of people, and through their policies we see people descending from a level of middle class to the lower levels of poverty. Hostile governments, both federal Liberals and provincial Tories, these fine people over here.

At one time we used to build a lot of housing through measures of the federal and provincial governments. Now that's no longer the case. The case is of a government to have a social responsibility to deal with social need, but

these people over there are abandoning social need. For them it doesn't matter, it's irrelevant. Witness the new Planning Act of Ontario, which they have repealed, the one that we had introduced, that prevents municipalities from having basement apartments. It was a little measure that would allow some of these homeowners who want to rent out a basement to do themselves a favour, because some of these homeowners are in trouble, they need help. So they thought, "How can we do something that's good for us but also good for those who are looking for affordable housing?" These Tories have abandoned that kind of social need.

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Because they're in bed with the big developers.

Mr Marchese: They're in bed with the big developers. We knew that. We talk about this every day, but I'll get to that because there's some time to speak about that.

You heard the member for Hastings-Peterborough. He says that the design of this bill is to make it fair to tenants. He was in the committee hearings. Bruce, he was there. Do you remember? I was there all the time. He says there are two motives: to make it fair — and he said tenants — and to increase the rental stock.

I want to spend a few moments that I've got again to expose the duplicitous nature of these statements and this bill. The title of this bill was the tenant protection bill. That's why I say the duplicitous nature of the bill.

Mr Kormos: Hey, you're pulling my leg.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm not pulling your leg. They've got hundreds of thousands of dollars of public money that they spend to come up with titles like that: the tenant protection package.

Mr Kormos: But it's not true. The title's a lie.

Mr Marchese: It belies the truth. Of course it does. I was in committee where 70% to 75% of the people who were there said: "Keep rent control that the NDP put in place. Keep it there." But I heard the member for Hastings-Peterborough. He said that the tenants said that the system needs to be fixed. I don't know where he's coming from. I was there. I was there for the tenant protection discussion, which was not yet a bill. For three or four weeks we dealt with that, the same stuff. Then they reintroduced it; the same title, the tenant protection bill, and they said tenants say that the system is broken and needs to be fixed. They didn't say that. The landlords said the system is broken. Why doesn't he say that? I'd much prefer that he say that. Then I would feel better. But to say that the tenants didn't like rent control belies the truth.

It's part of the job of the opposition, those of us who heard tenants, those organizations that deal with tenant matters, individuals and organizations, 70% of all those people who came in front of the committee said, "Keep rent control in place."

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: The people who disagreed with that were three types: Tories — I'm not sure; that fellow at the back says, "This is a joke." I think he was at the meeting too. What's his name? Oh, Martiniuk, Cambridge. I don't know what the heck you're saying about —

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker: My friend has referred to a survey. He said 70% of the tenants surveyed suggested — I would like a copy of that. I think, pursuant to the rules, if he refers to it —

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Member for Cambridge, sorry, that can't be considered a point of order.

Mr Martiniuk: He referred to it.

The Acting Speaker: You can't correct the record. If you don't agree with him, that's one thing. You'll have an opportunity perhaps later.

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Mr Marchese: The fellow says that either I was a joke or what I said was a joke, so I had to refer to him. He's the member for Cambridge, Mr Martiniuk, who said that whatever I said was a joke. I think he was either in those committees or he may have attended some. I said for his own recollection and for clarity that 70% of all the people who came were tenants or tenant organizations or organizations that deal with tenants. He obviously wasn't listening when I said that.

Mr Kormos: He is paid to listen.

Mr Marchese: But they say they're listening; that's the bloody problem. They say they're listening all the time to what people have to say, that they bring bills out so that people can respond to them, and presumably once they've responded they would listen. Good Lord, this is one example out of so many where we know these guys haven't listened.

It is an embarrassment to have these people — and M. Harris, mon ami the Premier, stands there too with a straight face every day. He was talking about education and how concerned he is and he's putting money back into the classroom, in fact more I think. He doesn't want to take responsibility for being in government for the last two and a half years and continues to blame others for any problem he is facing. But with a straight face he and the Minister of Labour — the Minister of Labour, she has a straight face, I can tell you. The Premier today stands there with apparent sincerity to say what he's doing for education. I have to admit the guy was a teacher too. He was a teacher. I have to admit I was a teacher as well, so I have some insights into the field. But to hear him speak, you wondered what he was teaching. Anyway, we won't get into all the details about what he was doing when he was teaching math; I think he was a math teacher.

Mr Kormos: No.

Mr Marchese: Yes, he was.

This bill has nothing to do with fairness, I can tell you that. A lot of people who came to that committee scoffed at the title of the bill and scoffed at what is contained within the bill because there is nothing in there for them, nothing whatsoever. So let's dismiss that and get on to the other matter of increasing rental stock, because that's the other issue these poor folks talk about.

A lot of people who came to the committee, including a representative from Norquay Homes, told the legislative committee last summer, "If the goal of this legislation is to

get people like me back constructing residential rental suites, it will fail miserably."

Mr Kormos: This guy is a builder?

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): One of the Tories' friends.

Mr Marchese: It's not one of my friends; it's one of theirs.

Now Phil Dewan, head of the Fair Rental Policy Organization of Ontario, the main landlord lobby group, says the new legislation won't get landlords to build either, presumably because this bill doesn't go far enough. I suspect that's what he meant. So your friends in the building industry are saying, "This ain't going to get me to build."

So you've got two things the member for Hastings-Peterborough said are the intent of this bill, and it doesn't achieve either of the two. What's going on? It's for that reason that I talk about the duplicitous nature of the bill. There is an inherent lack of clarity in the bill, in the title. But the title should alert people to the problem in the bill.

In terms of getting to construct, M. Lampert, your buddy you hired — well paid too — said that we've got a problem here, that there's a gap between what the cost is to construct versus what people can afford. He says to overcome that gap you've got to do some things. He says — and he attaches a price to each and every one of these things — you've got to reduce development charges, and the price for that is $355. Remember, the gap is $3,000 between building and what people can afford to pay in a rental accommodation. So you've got to reduce development charges. You've got to equalize property taxes. You've got to cut in half the GST payable, streamline regulations on building, halve the CMHC mortgage insurance fee, lower the administration due to reform of rent regulations, by which he means this bill, the deregulation, the decontrolling of rents; that's only $200 out of the $3,000 gap. Then he says you've got to eliminate provincial capital tax. Do you see all that you have to do?

This, I remind you, is at the provincial level, because at the municipal level there are a whole lot of other things you've got to do, such as interest-free second mortgages, such as land leases, free land or delayed payment for the land.

Mr Kormos: This is a big developer?

Mr Marchese: To get these guys to build. Reductions in municipal charges and regulations, mortgage guarantees, zoning bonuses. Peter Kormos, my good buddy the member for Welland-Thorold, do you see what we've got to do to get these people to build? That's what this government wants us to do. They want to get out of the housing field. You'll recall that when these people got elected they said, "We're getting out of the housing field." They say, "We want to do that because we want the private sector to get into it." Ha; to get into it. They're not going to build. Norquay Homes, as one example only, said, "We're not going to build."

How are you going to get them to build? Well, you've got to get out the moola, the pecunia, from the public purse and give it to these guys. Is that what you think we should do? Do you think it's fair to dig into my public purse that senior citizens have to pay into? Low-income people, the middle class who are descending quickly into poverty, they've got to pay so they can get developers to build. I say no; I say that's bad public policy. I say that if you've got to give so much to the private developer to build, it is better that we as a government hold on to the capital by building than to give it away at cheap prices so the private sector can build and own those buildings. It's better, because then that capital remains yours; then you as a government are able to control that housing so that you can give proper, adequate, affordable, accessible homes to people who need them, people who are disabled. We know 15% of the population suffers from a disability of sorts. We need governments to be able to provide for such things as people with a disability.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: M. Bisson, mon ami, va-t-en, va-t-en. Someone has got to take care of them, otherwise there will be no one who will take care of them, because I tell you market forces are not there to take care of social need; they do not respond to social need.

I said to one of these developers who came, "If you are not going to build because it's too costly for you, who's going to look after them?" He said, "It's not my problem; it's the government's problem." I said, "The Tories say it's not their problem either; they're getting out." "Well," he said.

So you see we've got a big problem: These folks here are getting out of the housing field; their buddies, with the deep pockets going deep into the ground, are saying, "We can't afford it." Who is left to address issues of the social need? There's nobody there.

Mr Kormos: What about co-op housing?

Mr Marchese: Co-op housing was something the New Democratic Party introduced as a communal way of living which built, which brings together people of various incomes and people of various ethnicities and linguistic and racial backgrounds. People with disabilities, people with AIDS, for example, are taken care of in that kind of communal living. Do you think your private developer friends are going to worry about the person with a disability or HIV? They're not interested in that.

Mr Kormos: What did the Tories say to co-op housing?

Mr Marchese: The Tories said when they came in: "Billion-dollar programs, we're going to give them away to the municipality, and you're on your own, municipalities. We're not doing it any more." That's what they said and they're doing it now.

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They cancelled a lot of projects, non-profit and co-operative homes that would properly have dealt with the needs we have of a lot of people to be housed. They said no; they cancelled the deals. Of course they're still in courts over that matter, but they cancelled them. We've got a housing crisis in this province and these people want to get out of the field.

Mr Kormos: That's nuts.

Mr Marchese: It's nuts, as Mel Lastman would say. It's a nutty thing. Nobody with a sane mind would introduce such policies when they know that poverty is rampant, that we have a housing crisis. These people, as Mel Lastman would say, they're nuts.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): Except that Mel's got a problem.

Mr Marchese: Except Mel's got a problem. On the one hand he's right in terms of the expression he used; on the other hand, the guy says there's no homelessness in his part of the world. Come on. Sure, it's great for Mel to say, "This is a city with a heart, but we send all of our poor people down to Toronto" — right? — "where they have the housing, shelters, where they have put in money for the social need." But Mel doesn't have those problems. He ships them down to Barbara Hall, says, "Here, Barbara, you take care of them."

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): St Barbara, eh?

Mr Marchese: We've got Mr Colle here supporting Mel Lastman, and I know he's going to speak to this bill. Maybe Mike Colle, the member for Oakwood, wants to talk about Mel Lastman's issue of homelessness. Anyway, that's another matter.

I want to quote Professor Hulchanski who says this:

"A market fails when supply and demand do not and cannot function normally. We have had market failure in the residential rental market in Ontario for more than two decades. Changing a set of regulations enacted in response to market failure does nothing to address the underlying macroeconomic dynamics causing the problem.

"When there is inadequate market demand and thus little new supply in the rental housing sector, vacancy rates remain low and tenants require adequate regulations to provide some degree of balance" — which is what the NDP tried to do to restore that balance we didn't have. These people come, sit with a big, fat body — right? Not fat body; I take that back, Madam Speaker — with a great deal of heaviness sit on that balance, on that see-saw, and shift the whole weight around.

"The problem," Professor Hulchanski says, "once again, is that construction of new private sector rental apartment buildings is not economically viable. This is why last year 96% of Ontario's housing starts were for homeowners. Homeowners in the province have enough income and wealth to generate market demand for housing; most renters in the province do not have the income to generate market demand in either the rental or ownership sector."

That's really the argument. I don't know what these guys want to say. You hear all the balderdash, the nonsense that comes from there. How can you believe the nonsense? This is my worry. My worry is that there are a lot of people who I think believe the nonsense, and that's why we need to expose the problem.

Professor Hulchanski makes the point again that the Conservative government brought in rent control in 1975 and had no choice but to respond to the market crisis with regulations. Let me tell you some points so that it's clear. He says, "Private rental starts fell from a peak of about 40,000 per year in 1972 to a few thousand in 1975." That was prior to the rent control introduced by the then Conservative government. It was prior to 1975 when rent control was brought in by these other people, who at least at that time had some consciousness, what they call red Tory types. These people have lost that. "Ontario's consumer price index climbed dramatically throughout the 1970s, peaking at close to 12% in 1981, and interest rates reaching 21% in August 1981." The market was failing us and the government responded to that particular problem. That's why these Tories introduced rent control at the time.

Let me get to some quick matters, before I pass it on to my other colleagues as well, in terms of what this bill does that isn't helping tenants. First, it decontrols rents. It is a form of the abolition of rent control as we know it. What does it mean? It means that as soon as you leave your apartment, somebody coming in will be charged a higher rate of rent than the person who was in that apartment before, any amount, M. Turnbull, that the landlord could get, could squeeze out of the tenant. Then they say rent control kicks in again.

But the real difficulty is that decontrolling mechanism. That's when the landlord can charge what he wants, and in a tight market such as Toronto anything goes — not just Toronto; Metro Toronto. That means any landlord who can squeeze as much as he can out of those poor-income people will do so.

I remind you that 30% of all people who rent, and there are 3.2 million, earn less than $22,000. That's a lot. These are the people who are going to be hurt by the policies of this reptilian government. These are the people who are going to be hurt by those policies, and not just those 30% who have a low income, but imagine the next sector of a population in that rental market. How much could they be making, Peter, $25,000, $30,000 maybe? It still means that these people have to spend most of their money, more than 30%. In some cases some of these people are spending 50% to 70% of their income on rent alone, let alone other needs that we have as human beings to clothe, to feed and to do some other little things any other normal person with a decent salary can do.

They're after low-paid people. They're after people who on the meagre sum they might receive from social assistance will have to pay more to support a transference of wealth from the poor to those landlords who already have money. It is an utter shame that any government could stand up and say, "The scope of this bill, the intent, is to make it fair and to increase the rental stock." It is a shame. That has nothing to do with anything this bill does, which will hurt so many people.

This bill also says that if you are not moving, you're safe. But you're not. The guideline for next year will be 3%. You could increase for capital repairs by another 3% at the moment, but it goes up by 1% more. That's a 1% increase if you are a sitting duck and not moving, with the inclusion now under this bill of paying for hydro and taxes. I tell you the taxes will go up, inevitably, because of the download of this government to those poor munici-

palities to pay for the problems. There's so much in this bill, I want to move on as quickly as I can.

Costs no longer borne will no longer be withdrawn from the rent. That means tenants will pay, for example, for a new fridge while continuing to pay for the old one to support the poor landlord who's not making a good living. I'm talking about the big landlord. I'm not talking about the man or woman or the widow who owns a house and rents a little apartment or basement. I'm not talking about them. They're not talking about them. This bill is designed to support the landlord who's got 20 apartments. That's what we're talking about, 20 apartments, the big corporation, the big landlord who's got a big, deep pocket to support himself. They want to transfer all this wealth, more wealth to these people and take away from those other poor folk who can't afford it.

There's a lot more to say but I know my colleagues want to speak to this. Those who are watching this station, and I know there are more and more of you, you've got to fight back and protect a way of life that is being destroyed by this reptilian government.

1650

Mr Carl DeFaria (Mississauga East): It is a pleasure to join this debate today. I would like to tell the House that the reason I decided to join this debate is because of the package that was introduced under Bill 96. I am not one who is known to be trumpeting every package or every policy that is put forward in this House, but Bill 96 provides a comprehensive protection package for tenants in Ontario and, at the same time, allows for development and construction of new housing stock —

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): Really?

Mr DeFaria: — and renovation of decaying, vacant buildings in our major urban centres.

I know the member across from Scarborough North just interjected and said, "Really?" I'm sure he does not advocate the status quo. I remember the member on June 21, 1991, indicating that: "Bill 121" — the NDP rent control bill — "does not in any way protect tenants or landlords. It hurts both landlords and tenants. It does not provide funds that are needed to complete the necessary repairs in the province's aging rental housing." I'm sure the member recalls his statement in this House.

Bill 96 accomplishes a balance between the protection of tenants and the need for new rental housing stock. But I'd like, first of all, to talk about the input and the submissions we received during the hearings we held across the province. I was, together with the member for Fort York, in Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Ottawa, and we heard groups making submissions. We heard some tenants, but I can tell you that the majority of people who spoke before us were legal clinic lawyers.

I recall some 20 years ago working in a legal clinic, at Parkdale Legal Clinic, as a law student. I recall the lawyers in the clinic were supposed to handle cases for low-income people, help them with their problems in court. Those lawyers spent the majority of their time advocating changes and lobbying the government and advocating things that are in the purview of elected people.

But those were the majority of people who appeared before us, and they submitted almost identical submissions. Some of them travelled with us in the plane from town to town as we were travelling in committee, I'm sure at taxpayers' cost, which is quite unacceptable. There were a few tenants, a lot of them brought in by some of these groups, but the ones who came on their own were the best ones and the ones who made some useful suggestions and comments.

The major comment that was made to us by every presenter was that there was a need for change, that the act was an old act that needed to be overhauled.

Mr Marchese: It did not.

Mr DeFaria: I heard members across saying, "It did not."

Mr Marchese: Tenants didn't want a change; you know that, Carl.

Mr DeFaria: The member for Fort York says tenants didn't want to change. I'd like to quote someone who said: "Many people assume that rent control is there to protect lower-income tenants in the units that they rent. In fact, it is the upper-income tenants who get the most benefits."

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): Was that a friend of the NDP?

Mr DeFaria: That was John Sewell —

Mr Gilchrist: Oh, a big friend of the NDP.

Mr DeFaria: — who said that on Studio 2, TVO, in an interview. So obviously people wanted change.

Mr Gilchrist: That's a start.

Mr DeFaria: That's a direct quote from his statement.

Some of the changes that were made —

Interjections.

Mr DeFaria: I again hear people on the Liberal side talking about no need for change. I'd like to remind them of the Liberal red book that says, "Within our first year in office, we will simplify the existing system and streamline it to provide better service to tenants and landlords." This is again a statement that indicated there needed to be changes, and that's exactly what we have done.

One of the comments we heard, for example, that was a useful comment was regarding the need to provide a requirement for municipalities to notify tenants when there has been a tax decrease so that tenants could then enforce their right under the act to have a decrease in rent. We have provided that in section 127, where we have mandated municipalities to notify tenants in residential complexes any time there has been a decrease in the taxes for their unit so that they can receive an abatement in their rent. This is a fundamental right, and it's a right that will expand the power that municipalities have so that they can use different rates to assess apartments so that tenants can benefit, because any lower municipal taxes will result in savings to tenants under this bill.

But let's look at Bill 96 and see how it strikes a fair balance between protection of tenants and the stimulation of construction and the economy. My friend the member for Fort York knows very well that a lot of his constituents are construction workers and a lot of them are small landlords and small people. This bill does a lot for them.

Part II and part III of Bill 96, if you look at them, are almost identical to the existing Landlord and Tenant Act, mainly part IV of the Landlord and Tenant Act. It protects every single right that is there in the Landlord and Tenant Act and provides tenants with security of tenure. For example, section 24 of the bill provides for repair, requires the landlord to repair the premises to comply with property standards laws.

Mr Curling: That's new.

Mr DeFaria: It's there, and now even if the tenant is aware of these violations, of property standards violations, he can require the landlord to comply with them, and this protects the tenants and prevents slum landlords and slum-residence conditions.

Sections 37, 39, 44 and 45 of the act, the provisions for notice requirements and grounds for terminating a lease, are exactly the same as in the existing Landlord and Tenant Act.

Section 70 prohibits a landlord from evicting tenants without obtaining an eviction order and also provides that the tribunal has the discretion to refuse to evict a tenant unless it's unfair to refuse such an order. So there are all kinds of protections provided for tenants under this bill.

Section 52, which is the condo conversion, goes further in protecting tenants from being evicted when a property, a rental unit, is being converted into a condo.

1700

Let's look at the provisions of rent control under this bill. Part VI of the bill continues rent control for every existing tenancy agreement in Ontario. Every single agreement in existence today is protected under this bill. Sections 114 and 121 provide that for every existing tenancy agreement today and for any rental stock existing today, once an initial rent is in place, rent control stays.

So what is the change and why is the change necessary? In order to stimulate construction of new rental stock, create construction jobs and renovate the decaying, vacant buildings which are becoming very noticeable in some large cities such as Toronto, section 4 of Bill 96 partially exempts any newly built residential complexes from rent control. These are rental units that have not been built yet, that have not been built in the past few years because of rent control.

Mr Curling: Really?

Mr DeFaria: That's correct. These are rental units that do not exist today and will not exist tomorrow but for this exception. This exception does not hurt any tenant at all, because a tenant of today may not be a tenant by the time those new units come into the market, unless my friends across don't believe in the Canadian dream that I believe in and that everyone who came to this country is a part of.

What is the problem? The problem is the status quo. I'll quote some statistics on deregulation in some jurisdictions where it took place. This is about Cambridge, Massachusetts, an area that I lived in for about two years. I know this area very well. I'll quote from a study done by Dr Ari Polakowski at MIT. He conducted a study and found that rent control tenants in Cambridge, Massachusetts, were less likely to be in families with children, about half of them had higher-status, white-collar jobs, and only 10% were elderly. The substantial housing benefits were going to relatively well-off tenants. For many, the end of rent control meant the loss of a good housing deal — a discomfort but not a hardship.

We have known people in Toronto who used rent controlled units, who used subsidized housing just to get a good deal. We have known some elected people who used it to get a good deal — not that they needed it.

The study also goes on to state: "...and deregulation in Massachusetts seems to be having a beneficial effect on the housing stock, particularly in Cambridge. The number of building permits has increased and anyone walking through the city can clearly see the numerous buildings that were once rent controlled and now are being renovated." This is a study that was published in the New York Times on June 13, 1997. So we know that what we're doing is good for Ontario.

The act also provides an exemption to low-income landlords, landlords who are likely to reside in the west-end area that my friend from Fort York represents. I wonder if the members opposite also object to this exemption given under clause 3(i) to low-income homeowners who need to rent part of their house in order to afford mortgage payments, when they share their bathroom or their kitchen with a tenant. Obviously the stereotype that all landlords are capitalists is not a correct one.

Mr Speaker, I see my time is over. I wish to thank you and thank my friends for allowing me to participate in this debate.

Mr Colle: I just want to talk to a few points in this bill which I thought were some of the main deficiencies in it and the ones that I think are most harmful.

Keith Norton came to speak to the committee. As you know, Keith Norton was a former minister of the Conservative government and he is now the commissioner of human rights in Ontario. He emphatically told us at the committee that parts of this bill are discriminatory, in that this bill now allows a landlord to use the income of the applicant and to use that person's lack of income as an excuse or a reason for excluding someone from renting. Here is the human rights commissioner of the province directly telling the committee and this government that they should not have had that clause in there, yet the government still kept this discriminatory part of the act in the bill that's about to be passed.

As Mr Keith Norton said, "That's paternalistic. I suggest it's demeaning...." He also said: "There are certain groups within our community who may be recent arrivals in Canada, for example, those whose incomes are low and who would be discriminated against, not directly because of their race but indirectly because of their incomes."

Some unscrupulous landlords may use that income information to keep people out of homes. As you know, many poor immigrants who come to urban areas may not have high-paying jobs but they're very good at saving, they're very good at keeping a household going, and their income alone should not be the criteria for saying they

can't rent. That is one part of the bill that I find most upsetting, especially when it could have been amended to stop this kind of discrimination. That is not a member of the opposition saying that; that's the human rights commissioner, a long-time, lifelong Tory.

As you know, the Conservative government itself introduced rent control legislation back in 1975, so there are a lot of Conservatives in Ontario, old-time Conservatives, and they are supportive of rent controls. They are supportive of protecting people on fixed incomes in rental accommodation. It's not just one party or two parties; traditionally people of all stripes have seen a need for it and I think that's why Bill Davis introduced rent controls in 1975. It's sad to see something that's been building and improving — and certainly there's been some need to adjust the rent control system — and now all of a sudden in essence we see the gutting of rent controls by this government of Mike Harris.

As you know, where the problem is most acute certainly is Metropolitan Toronto. As far back as I can remember, Metropolitan Toronto has always had an acute housing shortage. That goes back to the early 1970s. It goes back even to the post-war period when they built temporary wartime housing in our public parks. I know the member from Etobicoke will remember that in some of our parks downtown they built wartime housing after the war, and some of it remained right up until the 1950s because there was a shortage of housing.

Toronto will always be a place that draws people from far-off lands, from different parts of Canada, from the Maritimes, who come here seeking jobs, seeking employment, so there will always be a lack of affordable housing here. This is why this bill is especially important to people in Metropolitan Toronto and the greater Toronto area. It does not recognize that there is and there will be and there has been an acute housing problem, one of affordability, one of access in Metropolitan Toronto. This bill fails to recognize that.

1710

I know the proponents of this bill say this is going to mean an onslaught of all kinds of construction of rental housing. I think even some of the deputants before the committee said this bill is not a panacea, is not going to mean that people are going to start building rental accommodation, especially in a market where the trend today is to build town houses or condominiums. Condominiums are investments that give a much quicker return to an investor than rental accommodation. There's going to be no panacea here, that all of a sudden construction of rental accommodation will be taking place because of this bill. That's a pipe dream and I don't think anyone believes that. It's not going to solve that.

As you know, what compounds many of the shortfalls in housing is that not only do we now have this oncoming decontrol taking place, but when this government took power two years ago the first thing it did was stop the building of all affordable units in Metropolitan Toronto and the province. Those affordable units are much needed because of the waiting list we have for affordable housing, certainly throughout the province and especially Metropolitan Toronto. You can't take a chance with this bill and at the same time stop the building of affordable housing. The affordable housing is, generally speaking, for people who live on the margins, either because they're older citizens or people who have lost a job, people who are unable to earn an income whereby they can pay market rent. You have to have affordable housing in Metropolitan Toronto because of the fact that there's just so much demand and the supply of affordable housing is not going to be there.

If you go around Toronto now, the ironic thing is that you see all over Metropolitan Toronto the building of all kinds of luxury and upper-level condominiums. Those are for people generally in the middle- and upper-income levels. They're not going to meet the needs of our seniors and working people in lower-income brackets. The response of the marketplace to the shortage of housing in Toronto has been that the free market is out there building luxury condominiums. There's proof right there that the free market by itself cannot meet the needs of people in need. That is one of the main lessons of the marketplace. It doesn't work by itself. It's not as if the government should totally control the marketplace, but you have to have some kind of involvement. With this bill, along with the cessation of affordable housing, you're creating a very dangerous framework for an acute housing problem, especially in the area of affordable housing.

As you know, this is not only about downtown Toronto; this is about all of Metro and the GTA, whereby people are looking to try and just pay a basic rent to make ends meet. This bill does not help them one iota. I say to you, in many cases it doesn't even help the landlords because there are so many complexities still in this bill.

This bill is not a panacea. In fact, it is going to scrap things like rent freezes where landlords don't do their job in complying with work orders. It makes conversions easier; we're going to lose a lot of good apartments. It also makes demolition easier. There are a lot of negatives here, and by no means will it mean that affordable housing is going to be on the market, certainly in Metropolitan Toronto.

Ms Martel: It's a pleasure to speak to this resolution this afternoon. I'll speak for a few short minutes, because I want to share my time with the member for Beaches-Woodbine.

But I want to say that the whole title of this bill, the Tenant Protection Act, is an oxymoron and has been from the beginning. The white paper was; this bill is. There's nothing in this bill that is going to protect tenants across this province. There is everything in this bill, however, that protects big landlords in this province, the friends of the Conservative government, everything in this bill that will make sure that they get increased rents, that they use every means at their disposal to force economic evictions for people in those units to get them out to increase rents. They will increase rents on the existing units, given all the incentives the Tories have in this bill.

At the end of the day, these same landlord friends who are going to make all kinds of money from the changes in this bill aren't going to build one single new unit of affordable housing in the province. Developers and landlords who came before the committee told members that again and again, despite whatever the Tories want to say different. People who came before the committee who build in this market said they wouldn't because they want more and better incentives and better handouts if they are going to do anything.

I want to make a couple of points. Let me follow up on the last one first. I was at the hearing in Sudbury. I heard one of the developers, the only developer who came forward, who said that unless the government provided some other incentives, some other handouts, some other cash, economic means, tax breaks, you have it, he wasn't interested in building in this market. He was not interested.

That followed from what the committee heard on the white paper when they went out a year ago; that followed from what the committee heard in other communities. Despite what the Tories say, that somehow these changes are going to result in increased units on the market, the only units that are going to be increased on the market are condominiums and the high-rental market, not affordable housing for people who need affordable housing in this province. We heard that again and again.

Tenants under this bill are going to face all kinds of harassment from unscrupulous landlords, all kinds of ways and means to an end, to try and force those people out of those units, because under the bill, once you can get a person out of the unit, you can increase the rent.

We heard from tenants and from legal clinics that provide representation for tenants many horror stories of people who are already facing all kinds of unscrupulous activities from landlords now, under the current bill. We heard about people who couldn't get their plumbing problems fixed, who couldn't get mice and rat problems fixed, who couldn't get insect problems fixed because there were unscrupulous landlords who had no interest in doing that.

Imagine for those people, for those unscrupulous landlords who are already prepared to do that, the financial incentive they will now have to force those kinds of things even more to get people out of those units, because once they can get people out of those units, they can increase the rent to whatever they want and charge whatever they want. For those people who are already using all kinds of awful means to attack and harass tenants, imagine what will happen now under this bill when they know they will have a financial incentive now as well to get people out because they will be able to raise their rent to whatever level they want.

This government has tried to say, and this is the third point I want to make, that somehow the tenant is going to be able to negotiate with the landlord the rent for that unit that has been vacated.

This government has no idea about the lack of power that tenants have and all of the power that landlords have, especially big landlords. For goodness' sake, what kind of negotiation is going to go on in a tight rental market like Toronto, for example? Imagine a tenant coming forward and saying, "I only have $600 to give." The landlord says, "I want $1,000." "I can't afford it." The landlord says: "Thank you very much. I've got other people who desperately need housing who can afford to pay $1,000. Go on your merry way."

There's no negotiation that's going to happen in a tight rental market. People are going to be squeezed. They are not going to be able to afford high new rents that some landlords want to charge. As a result, people who are forced out of their other apartments because of economic evictions are going to find themselves on the street, because in Toronto and many other cities, landlords are not building affordable units. We know they're not. We know they are not going to when this bill becomes law.

Those tenants who stay in their apartments, who now become sitting ducks, still will suffer a rent increase, and this government refuses to acknowledge that. These tenants are now going to face a guideline of 3%, they're going to face a possible capital cost of 4%, then they're going to have to deal with a pass-through of utility and property costs on top of the guideline, and some of them are also going to perhaps face the cost of a fridge and stove they've paid for, and those costs will still continue. Even people who have to stay in their units because they're afraid of moving because they're afraid of even higher rents, are themselves going to face a significant rent increase under this bill and under this government.

1720

The Conservatives have done nothing to protect tenants. This bill is all about how they can protect their landlord friends and make sure those folks, the bigger ones in particular, can make even more money. They've got absolutely no interest in ensuring that affordable housing is built in this province. That's clear, because they cancelled co-op and non-profit projects we were undertaking, and there's nothing in this bill to force landlords to build under this scenario. The government has shown no concern for tenants whatsoever.

I don't want to let the Liberals get off the hook in the short time I have. I notice that in the Liberal motion it says, "Whereas Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has committed to scrapping Bill 96 and replacing it with meaningful rent controls," and then it goes on to talk about the "government to stop." I was here when the Liberal Party voted against our rent control bill because they weren't interested in protecting tenants. I was also here when this same government —

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Order. Take your seat.

Member for Sudbury East.

Ms Martel: I was also here when this same group of folks on this side voted against a resolution that was moved about a year ago by my colleague Mr Bisson, who was our housing critic at that point, which called upon the government to "maintain a fair and equitable rent control program, similar to the present rent control system introduced by the previous New Democratic Party govern-

ment." The only people in the Liberal caucus who voted for that were Mr Agostino and Mr Mike Colle. The rest voted against.

You've got the same thing happening. Federal Liberals, provincial Liberals and the provincial Tories don't care about affordable housing, don't care about tenants. They're in the same bed as far as I can tell, and it's tenants who are getting the shaft as a result.

Mr David Turnbull (York Mills): I was compelled to join this debate today, because I just had to put a few things on the record.

First of all, let's talk about the Liberal record with legislation. They took over rent controls that were put in place by the provincial Conservative Party to protect tenants. What did they do? They changed it.

I want to tell you how they changed the legislation. They allowed the landlord to charge interest on a mortgage up to 85% of the value of the building, no matter what they paid for the building. This led to a practice which was known as stepped financing, so that when a building was sold — and buildings were being sold week by week and churned, always for higher amounts of money, because of this financing arrangement the Liberals allowed, which caused the largest increases in rents in provincial history.

When the NDP came to power they brought in some legislation. I didn't agree with their legislation — I'll speak to that in a moment — but what they did when they came in was they quoted some statistics, and guess what? Some of the tenants had had increases, according to the NDP, of 150%. That was as a result of the Liberal legislation.

While I don't often agree with the NDP, I have to say they were right in saying the Liberal legislation was totally irrational. Everybody was laughing at you except the tenants. The tenants were crying because they were getting the short end of the stick of your legislation.

You have the audacity to come in and complain about the legislation we're bringing in, which has continued rent controls as long as that unit is occupied. There is an element called vacancy decontrol that allows the landlord to set the market rent upon the unit becoming vacant. Guess what? This is something that the Liberals agreed to with the landlords. They made a deal and then they broke the deal. The landlords remember that. The tenants remember that you also abandoned them, because you allowed rents to go up.

This 85% financing would work like this: You would get a first mortgage. Let's say the building was a $1-million building, because an awful lot of small landlords bought buildings in those days, invested every penny of their savings for their old age, and they lost it. They actually lost it when the NDP came in and didn't allow any increases to go through as a result of repairs and renovations that they put in, which they were required to have spent money on before they could apply for the rental increase.

The only logical thing about your legislation, gentlemen in the Liberal Party — because I don't see any ladies there at the moment — was that you continued to allow to flow through the cost of renovation and repairs. This is something which had to be done beforehand. Only at that point could you apply to get the money back over the five-year period. The NDP retroactively said, "It doesn't matter that you have spent money; we're not going to allow you to get it." There are all kinds of landlords, small landlords, who had put their life savings, their pension money, into small apartment buildings, because the average landlord in this province owns less than six units. They went bankrupt and lost their life savings as a result of what the NDP did.

The tenants took it in the neck as a result of the illogical legislation the Liberals put in place.

So you having the audacity to bring this debate here today, I wanted to make sure the good people out there were aware of the facts. Anybody who needs further details should contact my office. I would be very pleased to furnish them. In view of the time, I have to sit down.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I just have to somehow respond to that comment from the member for — what's his riding?

Interjection: He doesn't have a riding.

Mr Patten: No, he has a riding.

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel): York Mills.

Mr Patten: I just want to remind the member for York Mills that in 1975 of course, when the Conservative government brought in rent control, it was not comprehensive rent control; it was partial rent control. That was to deal with units that were from 1975 and onward, which caused great upheaval in the community and forced the Liberal government at the time, when they were the government, to bring in a much more comprehensive rent control issue that did that.

Mr Turnbull: Which allowed rents to increase up to 100%.

The Deputy Speaker: You had your turn.

Mr Patten: The issue was that there was an attempt to provide it and provide fairness all the way around.

Mr Turnbull: You allowed 80% financing.

The Deputy Speaker: You had your turn. Order, please.

Mr Patten: I want to allow my colleague who was the housing minister at the time to have some time to speak, so I will just make that simple point, that the intent was a complete, comprehensive piece of legislation that addressed the whole sector, not simply part of it, which drove up rents incredibly throughout Ontario.

Ms Lankin: I have to say to the member for Ottawa Centre, if that was the attempt, it was a dismal failure, because the member for York Mills is right: There were rent increases of 150%; there were people having to pay key money to get apartments. It was a dismal failure, and that's why it needed to be changed.

I want to reserve the very short time I have to comment on the government's legislation, because I'm very concerned. I've been holding meetings with tenants in Beaches and in East York, talking to them about how this legislation is going to work and what it means for them. A

lot of people are very worried. We know that rents are going to go up for everybody.

Currently there are some guidelines and there are some hurdles you have to get over if you're going to pass on any capital costs. You're increasing those guidelines, but you're also allowing for complete pass-through of utility increases and property tax increases. With your download of costs here in Metro, property taxes are going up and renters are going to be paying that. We suspect that most tenants are going to see an 8% to 10% increase in Metro.

1730

Second, through the vacancy decontrol, you either make people prisoners in their apartments or you have complete decontrol of the market out there within three to four years. What it means is that you are waving a financial incentive in front of the nose of those unscrupulous landlords, and we all know there are some out there who are quite unscrupulous, to get people out of the apartments, to get rid of them, because then they can jack the price up. You know there's going to be increased harassment of tenants as a result of this.

There are other jurisdictions that have done this. You didn't come up with this idea of vacancy decontrol. It has happened in the United States in areas of New York; it's a debate in Boston in terms of the result of it three years down the road. I can tell you there is less affordable housing, tenants have been harassed, people have been forced out of their buildings through all sorts of unscrupulous means, so that landlords can jack up the rents.

The other thing you're doing is going to lead to a loss of affordable rental housing. You're doing away with the Rental Housing Protection Act, which allows municipalities to put controls on and stop the demolition of some rental buildings in order to turn them into condominiums. There again, you're going to have the tenants, the last ones who are holding out in the building, harassed to get out so they can turn this into a condominium, and you lose more affordable housing as a result of it.

Tenants are going to lose power with respect to being able to get needed maintenance done. Right now, if there are maintenance orders out against the building and the landlord doesn't act, you can go as a tenant and get a rent freeze put on that building — a collective action and get a rent freeze. We're working with some tenants right now. As soon as this law passes, that's gone. They don't have the power any more. The landlords can get their rent increases whether or not they proceed and deal with the outstanding maintenance orders. Why would you be taking such power away from the hands of tenants?

The other thing you're doing is completely taking away the fairness of the appeal process. Many things will no longer be appealable, but beyond that, you're no longer allowing group appeals. So if someone comes forward, an individual tenant, and is able to make the case that there's been a loss of service and therefore that's not part of the contract of what was in the rent, under the current system they could apply for a rent reduction, which would apply to the whole building. You're going to make every single tenant come and apply for that same rent reduction, as opposed to it being done as a group, a collective. This is a way to try and undermine the work of tenant associations and give more power to the landlords and less to the individual tenants. I really don't understand.

I think the bottom line for people is that they've got to understand that the changes that are coming are coming quickly and tenants are going to be hurt by them. Landlords are going to have financial incentives to harass tenants, to get tenants out, to increase the rents.

We will not see, in two years' time, the full impact of this, and that's the message I want to deliver to tenants in this province. It takes maybe three to four years for the full impact of this legislation to hit in terms of the devastation of the rental market. In two years' time this government across the floor will be up for re-election. Tenants are a powerful voice in this province. Tenants must organize. Tenants must ensure they extract a promise for a reinstitution of meaningful rent controls.

That's why I'm going to support this resolution, even though I find it very odd that it comes from the Liberal Party, which didn't do this themselves and voted against meaningful rent control under the New Democratic Party. But I'm going to support this because tenants need to organize. They need to get their act together and extract those commitments from politicians, because this government can't get elected without the support of tenants. Let me tell you, with what you've done, that support is eroding quickly every day and it'll be gone by the time the next election's here. I think that's a good thing, because tenants deserve fairness and right of access to housing in this province.

Mr Gilchrist: I'm pleased to sum up the comments from the government side on this resolution brought forward by the Liberal Party. The member for Beaches-Woodbine was quite astute in her final observation, that it is remarkable this comes from a party that has, I guess if it has any accomplishment, come down squarely on both sides of this issue over the last six years.

Back when the hearings took place for the NDP bill, they certainly came out very strongly in support of the landlords exclusively, I think you could say, and now they would suggest they are the friend of all the tenants in Ontario. I think people have a longer memory than that.

Let's recap exactly what the process was. Over a year ago the government brought out a policy paper, a discussion paper, New Directions on landlord and tenant issues, and we held hearings across this province. We received a total of 250 submissions from landlords and tenants and other interested parties. As a result of those submissions, this bill, Bill 96, was crafted.

This bill also followed the normal legislative process. It went through first and second readings in this chamber with fulsome debate, and then proceeded to more travel time and more hearings here in Toronto and we heard again from 130 different groups and individuals. Those people represented a wide spectrum of interests, not just people who live in apartment buildings. We had people from mobile home parks. We had people in land-lease, owned-lot communities, and quite frankly a far greater

discussion than has perhaps taken place before on this issue.

As a result of what we heard, the government brought forward dozens of amendments, over 70 amendments, and contrary to what is suggested in the motion itself, we also accepted five Liberal amendments and one NDP amendment, something that one would not deduce from this motion. The fact of the matter is, we even listened to the opposition parties as we crafted this bill.

The bottom line is that a number of very significant amendments and improvements were made in the course of the hearings, and quite frankly since the first discussion paper came out back in the summer of 1996. What we have now before us, awaiting third reading and ultimately passage into law, is a bill which will do a number of things to improve the lot for tenants in this province and put far greater penalties in place to deal with landlords who treat their tenants unfairly.

First off, what we're suggesting is that the issues involving landlords and tenants move out of the courts and into a specialized tribunal where the personnel involved will have the expertise and the time to deal with the landlord and tenant issues that do come up from time to time.

No longer will a simple dispute between a landlord and tenant be tied up on the court docket for months and months, as is the case in many parts of this province. We've guaranteed that the tribunal will have the resources to deal with landlord and tenant issues in a very timely fashion, and in fact will travel to the communities, not just be resident where the court buildings are right now, but will travel across the province and deal with issues as they arise in various communities.

We're putting in place a process that will allow a fair hearing for both parties. But even before that we're making sure that far more of the issues that may have become the issue at courts before can be resolved between the landlord and the tenant. We've done that by clarifying a number of issues. Not the least of them were the issues arising about rent control. Rent control is a failure. Rent control is an admission of failure. It is an aberration. It is interference in the free marketplace and, quite frankly, it is totally unnecessary in Ontario today.

Having said that, we didn't take that step. We didn't eliminate rent controls. We made one very simple change. Because at the end of the day presumably the people opposite and any reasonable person would agree that it's the resident who needs protection, not the bricks and mortar. So what we have done is to say that as long as someone stays in their apartment, any apartment, rent control continues to apply, and only after someone voluntarily leaves their own apartment would that apartment be free of rent control and the landlord could then try and get a different rent out in the marketplace.

But let's remember two things: I've yet to encounter, in all these hearings and all the discussions with people around this topic of their old Landlord and Tenant Act, our new Tenant Protection Act, one tenant who has said, "I'll move out of the apartment I'm very happy with just on a whim and I'm going to start wandering the streets without knowing where I'm going."

Obviously a tenant negotiates with the new landlord first. The tenant knows where they're moving, knows the terms of the new rental contract, knows they can afford that move, and then relocates. Obviously, in that circumstance, which is the normal circumstance, the old unit sits idle, totally at the whim of the old tenant. The situation across this province, if you were to listen to the opposition party, is that then the landlords could turn around and make outrageous profits by jacking up the rents.

Unfortunately, and as is far too often the case in this chamber, the facts belie that point of view. Outside of Metro Toronto itself there are only a handful of communities that haven't got staggeringly high vacancy rates, places like London with over a 6% vacancy, where hundreds and hundreds of apartments are sitting empty with advertisements in the London Free Press and in other rental newspapers and magazines every day. A majority of the apartments in London were renting for under $400 on the day the hearings hit. In fact, over 20% of the apartments advertised in that newspaper were going for under $300.

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If in fact the marketplace has all of these vacancies, how could a landlord on a whim engineer the rents up? There's only one way a landlord could get more money in that sort of competitive marketplace, and that's by spending a lot of money and improving the facilities to the point that it was worthy of higher rent. Presumably the old tenant moved out only because, for the same dollars or perhaps less, they were getting equal or better accommodation. Tenants don't move out intentionally and spend more for inferior accommodation. That wouldn't make any sense. The marketplace creates these vacancies and the landlords either have to lower their rents, which is what we heard throughout all of the hearings across this province, or they have to spend dollars and bring up the quality of the housing stock. There is no third choice.

One of the members opposite in their comments suggested that there was one developer in Sudbury who suggested the changes in this bill weren't enough to prompt him to make further investments. Any number of changes may or may not influence any one person in the province of Ontario. However, it's unfortunate the member was not able to participate in the other days of hearings, because she would have heard in Ottawa Minto Developments Inc, the largest landlord in the Ottawa area, announce a $31-million expansion in their capital budget specifically related to this bill. They would not have made those investments, they wouldn't be improving the housing stock for their tenants, if they didn't have the comfort that this bill was going forward and creating a fairer balance between landlords and tenants. I trust she received the press release that was sent out by Minto to all of the members.

When we see landlords that currently own thousands and thousands of apartments say that this bill is necessary and it will prompt the construction of new affordable

housing in the province, then we know we're on the right track. The numbers speak for themselves.

Surely even the NDP in their most outrageous moments would agree that you don't turn housing on like a tap. So whatever took place in 1995, all of 1995, could not be laid at the feet of the new government. It takes months to plan and then construct a building. In fact, that would be true well into 1996. In all of Metro Toronto in 1995, there were 20 apartment units built. In 1996 there were 37 more. I suspect this will come as a great shock to the member opposite, who believes in doom and gloom —

Ms Martel: How many do you think are going to be built? They want extensions. They told you that already, Steve.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Sudbury East.

Mr Gilchrist: — who believes that pessimism is the way to take our province to greater heights, but the fact of the matter is, in anticipation of this bill, landlords across Toronto have started making new investments. In July alone, one month, 206 new units were started.

Ms Martel: Are they affordable units or are they condominium units?

Mr Gilchrist: In the year before, in response to your legislation, 37 units.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sudbury East, I don't have to warn you again, please.

Ms Martel: Are they affordable? Building condominiums will not help the —

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Sudbury East.

Mr Gilchrist: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I appreciate your restoring order.

Again, you've walked right into this one: Yes. The answer to your question is that they are affordable: two buildings on Spadina and one building on Yorkview Avenue being built as affordable housing. The bottom line is, that's what's happening in response to this bill. All across Ontario we have seen vacancy rates rise and the market respond. Even here in Toronto, where the vacancy rate was 0.5% the day we were elected, it's now triple that. It has tripled as people, in response to the greater dollars they find in their pockets, as a result in turn of the tax cut, are now moving out of apartments and buying single-family homes, at record rates.

There have never before been the kind of housing starts in the greater Toronto area that there have been in these last two years. Housing starts are up 48% over last year, new home sales. Obviously, the people moving into them had to come from somewhere. They're coming, by and large, from medium- and upper-priced apartments.

The other way the marketplace is responding to ensure there's more affordable housing is by seeing rents go down.

Even more to the point, one of the other members suggested that this bill in and of itself will not solve all the housing problems. We agree wholeheartedly. Let me just read a few other comments.

I don't know whether the members opposite would respond favourably to this, but we've said that building code changes add to the cost of housing. That's why we waited two years and undertook a review of the building code, made a number of changes that will save multiple thousands of dollars in the construction of new homes.

We've said that we were going to keep the land transfer tax rebate for first-time home buyers — another way of encouraging people who are currently renting to go out and buy their first home.

We've said that the planning process was flawed and that there was a need to streamline the timetables, to ensure that the processing of building applications was done in a timely fashion.

Mr Duncan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Is there a quorum for the member's speech?

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is there a quorum present?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Speaker: Member for Scarborough East.

Mr Gilchrist: You know you've touched a nerve when they have to resort to those sorts of delaying tactics.

Let me go back to continue the list of things we've done. We're streamlining the planning process to ensure a more timely production of new housing stock. We've also placed a moratorium on non-profit housing, because we believe in co-ops; we just don't believe the government should be subsidizing them. Those are just a few things.

What's interesting is that the book I was reading from — and I would remind anyone watching at home that this is a Liberal opposition day motion — was the Liberal red book. Not Chairman Mao's red book, but something fairly similar: the Liberal red book. That's precisely what the Liberal Party called for, and that is precisely what we have done.

Rather than stand there and admit that we're on exactly the same track, we're on exactly the same wavelength, they play the game. This has nothing to do with representing landlords and tenants; it has everything to do with cheap theatrics, and it's unbecoming. The bottom line is that this bill has already, even before it has been passed, seen a number of positive impacts across the province, and there will be many more to come. There's no doubt about that whatsoever. We're not stopping. There will be continued concentration on the means through which we can ensure that there are lots of incentives for the creation of new housing, which also means more jobs and more investment.

I think it's also appropriate again, given that this is a Liberal opposition motion — one of my colleagues mentioned some of the comments made by the former Liberal housing member, the member for Scarborough North, Mr Curling. He said: "The current NDP bill hurts both landlords and tenants. It doesn't provide funds that are needed to complete the necessary repairs on the province's aging rental housing."

We've also heard the quote from the friend of every democrat, the man who quite frankly didn't think it appropriate to stand for office to express his views but still

would suggest that he speaks for all the people of Toronto, John Sewell. He said, "Rent controls affect only the well-off," that two thirds of the dollars go to benefit the wealthy. That's what John Sewell said.

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We can talk briefly about the successes in all those jurisdictions that have decided to eliminate rent controls in whole or in part. Just an excerpt from an ABC news show, Prime Time Live, on February 19, 1997: "Two years ago Massachusetts decided to end rent control. People are building housing now in Boston for the first time in 20 years."

Bottom line: This is nothing unique to Ontario. This is something that applies anywhere governments interfere in the free marketplace. Dr Larry Smith, a renowned economics professor at the University of Toronto and an expert on the housing market, said this is probably the ideal time to take off rent controls, but we didn't go that far. Willard Dunning, senior analyst for the Toronto market for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp, said the market is setting rents right now, not rent controls.

In the hearings the landlords came forward, many of them with thousands of units under their control, and some said not one of their apartments is at the maximum rent allowed under the NDP law. Not one of them is where it can be and yet the suggestion is that the changes we make will somehow drive up rents. The marketplace is guaranteeing that the rents will go down.

The member for Beaches-Woodbine made one other point and I'd like to follow up on that as my final submission here. There is no doubt the province alone cannot guarantee affordable housing. The single biggest barrier to affordable housing in Ontario today is the property tax treatment.

Most people are not aware that apartments are taxed, on average, over twice as much as the same square footage of a single family home, but there are many communities where it's far more than a two-to-one ratio. Here in Toronto a tenant is charged 6.2 times as much. So if the member's friends and one mayoral candidate are serious about dealing with tenant issues, are serious about creating affordable housing, then maybe as part of their commitments in the upcoming municipal election they will commit once and for all to bringing fairness to the property taxation on apartment buildings.

Let me highlight that. In Scarborough East, if the Scarborough government had been applying tax fairly, the average apartment would drop by $125 a month and the average rent would be $425 — obviously affordable.

They and they alone set the property tax rates and they and they alone have decided, perhaps because tenants don't vote to the same percentage as single family home occupants, and maybe because it's hidden in the rent they thought they could get away with it, but they and they alone can change that and they can reduce the cost of rents in every municipality in Ontario, not with another law, not with another regulation, not by interfering in the marketplace, but by bringing fairness back to the pricing of property tax all across Ontario. That's why I'm opposing this motion.

Mr Curling: Let me just use this opportunity to thank my colleague from Windsor-Walkerville for bringing forward a resolution to remind this government that the direction they are going in regard to protecting tenants is the wrong way, and all the words they have used in their bill are not fooling anyone out there. This has nothing to do with protecting tenants. I just want to say, on the eve of when you want to bring this legislation in, that I remind you all that 3.3 million tenants out there will not forget the direction this government is going.

I should also remind my colleagues in the Conservative Party that they were the ones who brought in rent control in 1975. I say that not to compliment them in any way that they had seen the light about rent control, but they were driven by this when they saw they would get beaten at the polls and needed the tenants' vote. What they did was they brought in a half-witted sort of rent control that almost did more damage to the whole process of protecting and bringing affordable accommodation to the over three million tenants in the province.

After years in government the people had thrown them out, and when the Liberal Party came in, in 1985, we brought in rent control that covered all units, moving towards a much more comprehensive, fairer policy in dealing with fair rental accommodation.

I heard the member for Scarborough East, who said he walks the streets and who also said their government believes in co-ops so much they don't have to support this. It seems to me they are convinced that landlords will build affordable units.

The enemy in all of this is not the landlord. The enemy in protecting tenants and having good rent control policy is that government over there, the Tory government. They keep on talking about beating up the landlords or tenants, when on the Liberal side we look at fairness, a way to protect tenants and to be fair to landlords in their investment. There's nothing wrong with that. We consistently say that and we continue to say that even when the NDP comes in and talks about "It's only tenants."

We feel that in this situation, to bring affordable units on to the market, government must play a big role, not destroying the co-ops, not destroying affordable social housing and giving it over to landlords and then saying to them they can deliver that. They will never deliver affordable housing. It's not beneficial, it's not profitable, and there is nothing wrong in having a profit in any way.

That is why my leader, Dalton McGuinty, and the Liberal Party will say whenever we become the government we will scrap this kind of makeshift rent control that you are talking about, which has no protection for tenants, none in the least, and we will bring in a proper rent control policy.

To say that here we have a protection policy — I remember when I went on the road for this New Directions discussion paper and I pointed out to all the tenants, who did not need to be pointed out on this matter, that this is the policy they're going to bring in. They said,

"No, it's only a discussion paper." If you read that discussion paper today and read Bill 96, it's the same thing. This Conservative Mike Harris government was intending all along to scrap rent control and all of —

Ms Martel: Alvin, they're all Reformers.

Mr Curling: My colleague reminds me of the bunch of Reformers we have who are masquerading as Conservatives, who are a shameful bunch compared to the real Progressive Conservatives I knew in the past. As a matter of fact, quite a few of the Reformers were skating, coming hurriedly to Mike Harris. Even when they were trying to form a provincial Reform Party he begged them: "Listen, we are great Reformers, we don't need another Reformer in the province. We are the ones who will deal with those tenants. We will make sure that the landlords are protected and the tenants are cast out on the street." That's why the member for Scarborough East says they believe in co-ops so much they don't have to support any affordable situation in this.

He comes here lecturing us. I hope when he goes home sometimes and those tenants see him on the street, they will talk to him about the protection. I wonder too what he will tell all those students who will be moving nearly every nine months and when they leave their accommodation their rents are going to go up. He said that's protection because they have given the rights to the tenants to do that.

When I spoke to a very renowned teacher, Wendy Gibb, who was selected as secondary school teacher of the year at Stormont Dundas and Glengarry County Board of Education, she was concerned, of course, when those students will then go to any university and find they will pay a higher price because this government believes so much in raising not only the rents of those students, they've already put some other costs in the sense of tuition fees and many other things that burden those students.

Saying now that they come to protect tenants in this new protection for tenants legislation doesn't go anywhere. Let me again remind them that rent control is a necessary tool that we must have. It is very much necessary. The landlords who have been beaten up every day will take this kind of legislation as a tool to make sure that their profits are enhanced.

Why do we need laws? We need laws to make sure that fairness is in the system. We're not concerned about those who are buying homes in affordable areas. It's those who can't afford it we must protect. This government isn't concerned about that. They will sell off all of those. But I should also remind them that one of the worst landlords we had, and they were protecting our property, was the government itself. But what these have done is sold out all of that to the landlords, sold out themselves in the Reform concept they have.

Today what we have, Mr Speaker, as you know even in your constituency, is that the tenants are not protected, and this government will continue to protect their rich friends.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that opposition day number 1 carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members; this will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1802 to 1807.

The Speaker: Mr Duncan has moved opposition day motion number 1. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Patten, Richard
Bisson, Gilles	Gerretsen, John	Pouliot, Gilles
Bradley, James J.	Grandmaître, Bernard	Pupatello, Sandra
Brown, Michael A.	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Christopherson, David	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Cleary, John C.	Lankin, Frances	Silipo, Tony
Conway, Sean G.	Laughren, Floyd	Wildman, Bud
Crozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario	Wood, Len
Cullen, Alex	Martel, Shelley	
Curling, Alvin	Morin, Gilles E.	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Baird, John R.	Hastings, John	Parker, John L.
Bassett, Isabel	Hodgson, Chris	Pettit, Trevor
Boushy, Dave	Hudak, Tim	Preston, Peter
Brown, Jim	Jackson, Cameron	Rollins, E.J. Douglas
Carroll, Jack	Johns, Helen	Sampson, Rob
Chudleigh, Ted	Johnson, Bert	Saunderson, William
Clement, Tony	Johnson, David	Shea, Derwyn
Cunningham, Dianne	Johnson, Ron	Sheehan, Frank
Danford, Harry	Jordan, W. Leo	Smith, Bruce
DeFaria, Carl	Klees, Frank	Spina, Joseph
Doyle, Ed	Leach, Al	Sterling, Norman W.
Ecker, Janet	Leadston, Gary L.	Turnbull, David
Elliott, Brenda	Marland, Margaret	Villeneuve, Noble
Ford, Douglas B.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Fox, Gary	Maves, Bart	Wilson, Jim
Froese, Tom	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Galt, Doug	Newman, Dan	Wood, Bob
Gilchrist, Steve	O'Toole, John	
Grimmett, Bill	Ouellette, Jerry J	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 28; the nays are 55.

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until about half past 6.

The House adjourned at 1810.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1er octobre 1997

The House met at 1831.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): Madam Speaker, the 37th order.

EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ÉDUCATION

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size / Projet de loi 160, Loi visant à réformer le système scolaire, à protéger le financement des classes, à accroître l'obligation de rendre compte et à apporter d'autres améliorations compatibles avec la politique du gouvernement en matière de qualité de l'éducation, y compris l'amélioration du rendement des élèves et la réglementation de l'effectif des classes.

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): As I resume my time from last night, I want to start by making two comments. The first is, I want to express my appreciation to the member for Mississauga South for being here so punctually. I know she wants to hear what I have to say. And I have to say that when the Minister of Labour got up to call the order, I thought maybe I was in the wrong session, because I know the House leader was also here and eager to call the order.

That aside, we are resuming what I guess is the third day of debate or the third evening of debate on Bill 160. I had the chance to say a few things about this last night and I have a few more minutes left on the clock which I do want to use to point out, particularly to the members of the government — because my sense is that more and more, people in the public are understanding the agenda this government has on education.

As I listened to the debate last night and as I heard a number of Tory members speak to this bill, I have to say that I came away with some surprise about how strongly they feel that what they are doing is so completely different than what is being understood out there in the school system among parents, teachers and anyone who is in any way connected with the school system with respect to the impact of Bill 160 and the other actions the government is taking within the field of education, let alone the rest of the agenda that we could talk about.

It seems to me more and more clearly that people are understanding that when the Minister of Education said some time ago that the way he was going to bring about change in the school system was by inventing a crisis, there is now a fairly broad consensus of understanding that he has done just that. Probably the one thing that can be said positively about the current Minister of Education is that he at least, although I'm not sure he meant to do it, had the decency to tell people what he was going to do.

The truth of the matter is that he has created a crisis. He's created a crisis not by bringing about change — and I want to say to government members opposite, I know a little bit about change. In fact, I also ran into a bit of trouble when I was Minister of Education because I tried to bring about some change. Ironically enough, I want to say that some of the trouble I ran into was with some of the teachers and the teacher groups. I want to be very clear about that. It's because I also have that understanding that I want to say that it's not the issue of change that is the problem.

I haven't heard anyone who has any kind of sense of what our school system needs say that the status quo is what we need to maintain. I, for one, believe we have a very good school system. I believe that in many cases it's actually excellent. But I also believe now, as I have believed for some time, that there are changes that need to be made to our system.

I think our system has for some time yearned for a more focused approach that, yes, puts resources more into the classroom. I know people mean different things on this, but by that I mean that we focus our attention on what we do with students. It doesn't mean, in my view, that you forget about what happens outside of the classroom in the rest of the school environment. It doesn't mean that you pretend that all the learning goes on inside the four walls of the classroom. It means, though, that you focus the attention and the resources on what goes on in the learning process of the child and the student. That involves a number of important things.

It's easy for all of us to say: "The student is the most important part of the system. That's the reason why teachers are there. It's the reason why any of us have anything to do with the system." Of course it is. But the telling is in the pudding, as they say. The telling is in what we do, not just in what we say.

If we went by the rhetoric that came out of the mouth of the current Minister of Education, we would have to believe that he has the best of intentions and that every single step he has taken and intends to take will make the system better. If you look, on the other hand, at not just what we anticipate is going to happen but at what has already happened as a result of the actions — not the words but the actions — of the current Minister of Education and the Tory government, then I at least draw a very different conclusion. The conclusion that I come to is that while the minister continues to talk about improving the quality of education, what he is doing is attacking the quality of education. He's diluting the quality of education. He's in the process of dismantling those things in the system which work.

He's doing that by putting in jeopardy programs that provide not just for the needs of every single child and every single student in the system, but also the programs that provide, for example, for people who are trying, as adults, to learn English as a second language, for people who believe that learning other languages is actually part of the learning process and is a very useful thing, for people who believe that there is a natural link between junior kindergarten and the kindergarten programs as a whole and the years even prior to that, so that there is a natural link between child care and junior kindergarten.

The actions of this government speak volumes certainly on those things. They tell us very clearly that what we have here is a government that has already, by the changes they have made to the funding formula, forced many boards to abandon junior kindergarten. The very specific actions that they are taking now in Bill 160 will mean that they will do away with child care centres in schools.

Coming from a city like Toronto, from a school system that has been at the forefront of putting child care centres in what was at the time empty school space, I can tell you that that is one of the travesties of what this government is doing: failing to understand that one of the key ways in which you invest in the education system is by putting a clear emphasis on what we do and how we support our young people right from those very early years before they even get to the kindergarten ages, when they need child care, because in fact that's the first entry, not just as a good service that needs to be provided to working parents but as a first entry into the learning process.

We could talk on the pedagogy and on the social value of our system for a long time, but the point I want to stress is that what I see in what the government is doing is the complete opposite of the rhetoric that the minister and members of the Tory caucus continue to speak.

I heard one member last night say it's about better student achievement. Well, I wish it were. But you see, it can't be about better student achievement. What you are doing cannot be about improving student achievement if what you also are doing is taking $1 billion out of the system.

1840

It's been really fascinating to see the kind of back and forth that we now are getting from the government around this question of the ensuing cuts. We know there have been already about $500 million of cuts that this government's action has brought about so far.

When the Minister of Education stands up and expresses surprise, when the Premier stands up, as he did again today, and expresses surprise at where it is that those of us in opposition have got this notion of $1 billion, I heard it again this morning on the radio. Where we got it was from Mr Snobelen, the current Minister of Education, who, as you will recall, about a year ago mused about the fact that in his view the system in Ontario was spending on average about $1 billion more than other systems across the country. He said that he wanted to bring the spending of the system closer to that average, and hence to take about $1 billion out of the system.

If he's changed his mind on that, there would be nobody happier in this House than I. If he has changed his mind on that, there would be many people across this province who will be delighted. But isn't it interesting that in all the opportunities that the current minister has been given and in all of the opportunities that the Premier has been given as they get on a day-to-day basis questions in this House, as they get questions out there in the press scrums, as they get questions as they go across the province, as people are seeing that we are on the eve of teachers walking out of the school system because they see that as the last way they have to impress upon this government that they object to the serious attack they are launching on the school system, isn't it interesting that with all of those opportunities, we have yet to see the Minister of Education stand up and say, "We will not take $1 billion out of the system."

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): He said it this morning.

Mr Silipo: He didn't say that this morning. Sorry. I don't know what he said this morning, but I heard what he said today in the House when my colleague the member for Algoma asked him the question, and he had a great opportunity to say, "We will not take $1 billion."

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): When did he say he would take it out of the system? Never. Never.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Come to order, member for Northumberland.

Mr Silipo: He was asked specifically, "Will you commit to reinvesting any money that you find through these changes back into the system?" What was the answer? It wasn't, "Yes, we will."

Mr Galt: When did he say that?

Mr Silipo: I find this really fascinating when I see the government members getting so excited about this point, because it tells me one of two things is going on. Either the Minister of Education is really continuing to do a major snow job on them, let alone the rest of the province, or maybe, maybe, maybe they know something or they hope they know something that the rest of us don't, and at some point during this process John Snobelen will stand up and finally say, "Yes, we don't intend to take $1 billion out of the system." As I say, I will be the first one to stand up and say, "I'm glad that's your position now."

Mr Galt: When did he ever say it? When?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Northumberland, come to order.

Mr Silipo: But until they do that, we can only go on what the current minister has said so far, and what he has said so far is that that is his intention. So long as that is his intention, you can see why people are so upset. You can see why people are concerned about the fact that those cuts of $1 billion will mean anywhere from 4,000 to 6,000 to 10,000 teachers out of the system, depending on which figures you want to look at, but even if it's 4,000 to 6,000, that's a lot of teachers out of the system.

What is that going to mean? It's going to mean that the big line that these people are carrying about capping class sizes is not going to do one iota of difference. It's not going to mean reduced class size. They may cap it, but what's the point of capping it if you're capping it at 40 students? This is what we need to get at. It's nice to have these code words that they like to use, but again, when they talk about capping class size as one of the big things they are going to do, have you ever heard the Minister of Education or the Premier say that they're going to actually lower class size? No, they're just going to cap it. At what amount? At what number? "Well, we'll see. We'll see. Who knows?"

Why is that we don't have the funding formula, which is at the end of the day going to tell us what's going to happen, in place? I tell you why. Because the marching orders that have been given to the bureaucrats who are putting those together have been that they've got to find $1 billion in the process. When they come back on the basis of those marching orders and they tell the Minister of Education, "Minister, the only way we can do that is by cutting the budget of every single school board except the 25 poorest school boards in the province," the minister says: "Oh, that's not what we want. Go around and figure out the numbers again."

But you see, that's what it comes to. You can't mesh $1 billion more in cuts with improving the quality of our education. If the minister wants to improve it, he has to stand up and commit to no more cuts. Then we can talk about what changes to make.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments? The member for Cochrane —

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry. I didn't see you. Relax. Member for Middlesex.

Mr Bruce Smith (Middlesex): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have a few minutes to respond to the member for Dovercourt. I couldn't agree with him more that more and more the public fully understands the agenda for education reform in this province. I say that not from a negative perspective, the one that he has presented this evening, albeit, in fairness to the member for Dovercourt, I believe he's presented a balanced and articulate position with respect to his experiences in education.

I would say that the minister has clearly told the people of Ontario what he intends to do with education, and that intention was to bring a leaner governance structure to education, a stronger curriculum and a new funding model for students across this province. I think that's the very focused approach that Ontarians are expecting and fully understand. So I fully agree with the member for Dovercourt that this viewpoint is understood and recognized.

The Minister of Education has clearly recognized that there will be some challenges during this transition period, challenges that will be difficult at times. But he has met that difficulty by responding and indicating that he's freezing the expenditures of up to $14 billion in recognition of the challenges that we expect to experience during this process. The talk of $1 billion, dollar amounts here, dollar amounts there — we have tried very strongly to reassure school boards in this province that there will be some stability as they move through this difficult period.

The member for Dovercourt spoke about change. I think he would know, as a former Minister of Education, of the 24 reviews that we've seen in this particular portfolio since 1950. Simply, the government is saying today that it's time to move ahead, it's time to act, it's time to bring students into greater teacher contact, provide them with greater instructional time, and to recognize the parental opportunities of increased involvement that they have in our school system. As PA, I've had a chance to travel the province and realize that parents are prepared to act.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I'd like to thank the member for Dovercourt for his excellent words and the wisdom he showed in his presentation. Member for Dovercourt, you should be very proud. You got the government heckling you, trying to discredit you in the House. You must have been telling the truth.

I think that's reinforced by the message that's out there. This is a letter I received today, and it's from the teachers and staff of Pius XII Elementary School. It says:

"We...congratulate you," the opposition, "in your daily representation against Bill 160 which everyone knows is a $1-billion-plus cut to the educational future of our children. We understand that this educational cut is to satisfy the government's promise of a tax cut and no moneys will be reinvested into educational improvement. We know that upwards of 10,000 qualified teachers will be removed from our elementary and secondary schools," which will further crowd already overcrowded classrooms. "Allowing unqualified instructors into our classrooms to try their hand at teaching our children is frightening.

"Stop Bill 160. We won't back down."

It's signed by everyone from Pius XII Elementary School.

I would suggest to you that the staff and the teachers at Pius XII Elementary School reflect what the staff and teachers and students and parents all over Ontario are thinking. They agree with the members of the opposition, they agree with the member for Dovercourt, that your direction is wrong. It's all about bankrupting the educational system to provide a tax cut.

I'll tell you, if you gave the people of Ontario the choice, they would rather you reinvest in education as opposed to reducing funding and diminishing the quality of

education which parents, teachers and students have worked so hard at improving and continually work hard to improve.

1850

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): I want to take a couple of minutes to congratulate the member for Dovercourt. Being a former Minister of Education in the NDP government, he knows what he's talking about when he explains how sad we are on this side that the first comments that John Snobelen made when he became Minister of Education were: "We have to create a crisis. We have to create a crisis in education in order to extract dollars out of it." They took out on an annual basis $800 million last year and the plan is to take out $1 billion in the future. The way of taking that out is to eliminate the amount of preparation time the teachers have at the secondary level and to fire or lay off up to 10,000 teachers in the education system.

We know that Bill 160 is a continuation of Bill 104, when they eliminated the school boards in the province of Ontario and created new boundaries and did everything they could to cause confusion throughout this province with parents, teachers and school workers.

They might think that they're succeeding, but the teachers and the parents and the students out there have caught on to their tactics. I'm sure that if Bill 160 is not withdrawn or watered down where the students will not be hurt and the parents will be able to have a good education, we're headed for a province-wide strike in this province within weeks, maybe days or weeks. It's going to happen.

It's a sad thing when you think that today the Minister of Education or Mike Harris could have committed himself, "We want to take $1 billion out of education but we'll reinvest it as we lay off the teachers and get rid of a number of staff." But they didn't say that. They haven't denied that they want to take $1 billion out of education. As a result, the education system is going to be destroyed in this province.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): In my two minutes I'd like to respond to the member for Dovercourt, but I was more taken by the statements made by the member for Middlesex.

First, I want to start by saying my wife is a teacher, I have five children and I firmly believe that this government supports all teachers who are committed to students. We support the teachers who want quality education.

I think if you look at the actions taken by this government, it is clearly on record, first of all, as trying to eliminate all of the opportunities for waste and duplication. I think the previous government went a long way — the formation of the College of Teachers — in strengthening the school system. If you look at the Sweeney report, our implementation was a reasonable implementation. Reducing the number of schools boards, those are expenditures that are outside the classroom. Those are the dollars that this government is trying to eliminate.

We're committed in the CSR, the Common Sense document, to funding in the classroom, and I think we can't lose focus on the student or lose track of the importance of the changes to emphasize the quality of education. One particular aspect I want to mention is limiting class size. I visit schools in my riding, as I'm sure all members from all parties do, on invitation, and I can't believe sometimes the complex situations that teachers are dealing with, with over 30 students in the class, with many different learning levels, many different social needs.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): What about Bill 160?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Fort York.

Mr O'Toole: It's almost multitasking in a single classroom.

I think if our minister can solve one problem and sort of cap the class size and improve the teacher contact with students, we'll have gone a long way to improve the quality of education. Clearly the reports support that.

Mr Marchese: How are you going to bring it down?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Fort York, come to order.

Mr O'Toole: Clearly this government supports the needs of education. The next most important commitment is to teachers, and next to parents.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Member for Dovercourt.

Mr Silipo: This is truly one of those times where I genuinely wish there was more time to be able to respond adequately to some of the comments. But I do appreciate the comments, and respecting, as I have to, the time that we have, let me just say this.

When members opposite talk about wanting to make change, as I said earlier, I can't but agree with the need to make some change. But there is a difference between change and chaos. What I see happening is that what the minister said he would do a year or two years ago, that is, to create a crisis, is exactly what the government is in the process of doing. What they are doing —

Mr O'Toole: What does Dave Cooke say?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Durham East, come to order.

Mr Silipo: There is no doubt that in this whole mix there are actually some positive things that are happening, but the basic direction the government is taking is fundamentally wrong because the basic direction is not based on a notion that says, "We're going to save some money here and we're going to reinvest that money back into the classroom." The problem with the premise on which they are working is that they believe they can actually spend less money in our school system and do more with that, and it just is not going to work. It is not going to work if the objective is to deliver a better quality of education.

You can redirect resources, and if you were doing that we could have a more constructive discussion. But what you are in the process of doing is creating a crisis, setting up a fight with the teachers, hoping to have the teachers, particularly the teachers' federation leadership, as a scapegoat in this fight, and pretending all along that you agree with and support the teachers. If you agree with and support the teachers, then please listen to what they are telling you, because they speak not just for themselves but

for the interests of students that they are now in the process of representing and on the front line of which fight they now are engaged in.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 160, but before I really get into it, I'd like to respond a little bit to the member for Dovercourt and also the member for Cochrane North, saying some very disparaging remarks about the minister.

Let me tell you, this is one of the finest ministers that education has ever seen. He has been into my riding to schools on two occasions. He went to St Mary's school where they were desperately wanting a new school. The opposition kept promising it in their term but never came through with that new school. This government has and this minister has. While discussing that school, he had time for students from that school to come to his office on three different occasions. On one occasion he had an hour set aside for them. They were three quarters of an hour late. He still had an hour for those students.

He's a consultative minister, and I can tell you that you're dead wrong in all of the comments that you were making earlier.

Mr Marchese: Hear, hear.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Fort York, come to order.

Mr Galt: I'm glad you recognize it.

Now to get down to serious business about this bill. There's no question that education in Ontario is in need of reform, and it goes back quite a way. It's probably been in need of reform ever since the Hall-Dennis report came in back in the late 1960s, and my, that report sounded good. It just sounded like everybody would be flexible and be able to do their own thing, including the teachers, but that old pendulum swung way over to flexibility and do your own thing, and it went way too far. Going some of the distance might have been in order, because we had the old departmental grade 13 exams, we had the entrance exams that were very specific and all hung on one particular examination.

Mr Bartolucci: That's what the teachers say. The Conservatives didn't listen to us at that time either.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Sudbury.

Mr Galt: But since this Hall-Dennis report, we've been returning to development of curriculum, first at the school level, and at the time I was on the school board in the late 1970s that was moving to the school board level.

Certainly the public and the parents have been very concerned about education. We hear complaints about vague reporting, we hear concerns about low academic expectations and we hear concerns about lack of meaningful involvement in some of the school decision-making that is totally out of the hands of parents. Ratepayers, since I was on the school board 20 years ago, have been at the verge of a tax revolt, and this has been going on for some time.

Just to stir up that pot, back in May when the Northumberland and Clarington board was getting together with the Peterborough board and they were deciding there would be one less board director and fewer superintendents, what did they do with the money saved? They divvied it up among the remaining superintendents and the director of education, giving a significant salary hike to the director of education. No wonder the taxpayers are upset and yelling and screaming.

Ontario happens to be, regardless of how you shake your finger, the world's highest in what they pay for education on a per student basis. In the Saturday Sun, just as one example, it said in Ontario we pay $644 more a year per student than the Canadian average. I hear the opposition talking about this $1 billion, which has never been stated was going to be taken away. However, if you calculate it out on a per student basis, we are spending $1 billion more than the average across Canada.

Mr Len Wood: Mike Harris did not deny it today.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Cochrane North.

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Mr Galt: If you look at the results, students are falling behind students around the Pacific Rim and Europe, and to bring that closer to home, in Ontario they are below the Canadian average in areas of math and science, based on the third international testing program. Indeed, these are reasons for reform here in Ontario.

In this article from the Sunday Sun, Richmond Hill teacher John Taylor is quoted: "'I will cross the picket line if the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation goes on strike.' He went on: 'I am truly fed up with the leftists who continue to advance their political agenda at the expense of the real educational issues — a meaningful curriculum, real assessment of teachers etc.' My comment: Don't be fooled by the propaganda." That was in an article by Linda Leatherdale.

Closer to home, in a Port Hope secondary school, an article written by Ian Elliott back about a year ago: "I don't remember the exact figures, but a significant number of those going into grade 9 required remediation in math or language. Most unfortunate." That was given, I gather, to that reporter by the teachers of that school.

Post-secondary instructors are telling us too many lack in the prerequisite skills of literacy, critical thinking, communications and problem-solving. Businesses tell us graduates are unprepared to challenge the working world.

We in Ontario, at the same time, are reducing our instructional hours while other provinces, which are really our competitors, are increasing the rigour in the levels of curriculum. The results are, our graduates are disadvantaged in the global economy. Indeed, good reasons for reform that's necessary.

Today's baby-boomers, the baby-boomer parents, richer than maybe some in the past, are very demanding. They're more demanding than ever and they want a world-class education. They have fewer children and smaller families. A quote from the economist David Foot, who wrote Boom, Bust and Echo: "The newest wave of parents are people with all their eggs in one basket and they can't afford to drop it."

More parents are looking to private schools. Why are they looking at private schools? They're looking for top-

quality education for their children. Some are demanding charter schools, alternative schools in our public system, for example, the R. H. King Academy in Scarborough. These schools are in hot demand whenever they're open. As a matter of fact, parents will stay up all night just to have a position in the line to get a space in those schools. More evidence that something is wrong in the system.

Society today is asking a lot of schools and many are finding them wanting, from what they're telling us, and this isn't Doug Galt saying this.

Mr Marchese: Where do you find it in the bill?

The Acting Speaker: Member for Fort York, come to order.

Mr Galt: Let me make some comments and quotes reflected in the royal commission which your party commissioned. It was called For the Love of Learning and it states, and I'm sure you'll be interested, "We believe that students can complete secondary school with a great deal more academic excellence, more rigorous analytical capacity, more genuine understanding and power of problem-solving."

I'm sure you'll also be interested in another quote in there: "One complaint we heard repeatedly is that the public education system no longer seems responsible to the public. There exists widespread unease that schools have become kingdoms unto themselves with little need to report to parents or the world at large what they are doing with our kids or whether or not they are doing it successfully."

We have many excellent teachers, consultants, principals; certainly there is no question. I worked with them back in the late 1970s when I was on school board. I have a daughter who teaches in the Durham board, a very dedicated teacher, literally works 24 hours a day, seven days a week at it. My mother is a retired teacher, my mother-in-law is a retired teacher, all very dedicated people in the profession, and I think they're just examples of many other teachers who are in that profession. But today they're caught in a bad system, a system that is broken, a system that needs repair.

The opposition over here wants us to believe that this bill is about teacher-bashing, and there could be absolutely nothing further from the truth. I hear from teachers who are very frustrated with the system and they're being told by their union the problem is lack of money, the problem is that the government is at fault. Very misleading information indeed from their union.

There are many barriers to increased performance such as the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy opposes change. The bureaucracy stresses conformity and they want the status quo. The bureaucracy insists that we continue with process and they really don't seem to be worried much about outcomes. Collective agreements are all about serving the needs of adults, not students. For example, in my board, the Northumberland and Clarington Board of Education, from 1995-96 to 1996-97, in the elementary panel the pupil-teacher ratio was increased from 16.5 to 1 to 17 to 1; in the secondary panel the same ratio was increased from 14.9 to 1 to 15.2 to 1. You might ask why this happened. It happened because the union wanted more money and they sacrificed the pupil-teacher ratio and increased class size. That was because of the union.

Last spring I was at the Murray Centennial School and they were asking me: "Why in grade 8 are there 45 students? The pupil-teacher ratio is 17 to 1." I said to them: "Where are the teachers? Is it important to have consultants, is it important to have vice-principals, is it important to have all these principals and administrators and coordinators, or is it more important to have teachers in the classroom?" I have not received an answer on that question since.

The unions are opposed to measures of performance and they're opposed to incentives for excellence. There is competition for resources and control in education. There's a provincial department of education, there are school boards, there's administration, there are teachers' unions, there are taxpayers of Ontario, not to mention parents. This is indeed a struggle that has created considerable concern.

Recently I had a phone call from a retired principal in Port Hope angry that this government might back down on our Bill 160, telling us to hold in there. Last weekend, touring various places in the riding, the message was over and over and over again to hold the line, don't back down. Yes, I ran into two parents who were concerned about their students and what would happen with a strike. I heard in a parade one teacher saying, "No, no, I can't wave to him because I'm a teacher." Imagine the kind of propaganda that poor teacher has been getting from their union.

In my office, correspondence and calls of support on this particular bill are running at least 2 to 1. I've never seen this kind of concern over any other bill that we've had in this House.

This indeed is a struggle for unions because these unions are very concerned about the $1,000 or so that teachers are giving to them in dues. Those dues just happen to be tax-free that you that I end up supporting. It supports headquarters that look like a Taj Mahal. The art on the walls is second to none, I'm told.

I just happen to have an article here about their salaries and I'm sure people would be interested. The president of OTF, $102,000 plus all the perks. Marshall Jarvis, president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, a nice even $100,000 plus cars and all the rest. Phyllis Benedict, president of the Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation, $124,000. Then M. Sadem-Thompson, of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, they tell me she gets more than that but she wouldn't admit to what her salary is: so maybe, I don't know, $150,000 or so. Can you imagine how upset Earl Manners must be because he's only making $98,000 plus all the perks? How embarrassing for him. Maybe he has a couple of jets to go along with it.

It's very strange that we have a profession looking at union status and also professional status. Most professions, for example, physicians, dentists, lawyers, veterinarians, have a college that's a self-regulating body and

then they have a lobby group that is voluntary as to whether you join or not. By the way, those dues are taxable. You don't get any tax-free money.

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I can see why the union leaders are absolutely petrified of this scenario. They may lose their six-figure salaries and they may lose their perks and they may lose their power. It's understandable why they'd be concerned. If I was them, I'd be in there telling the teachers all kinds of stories too. But it's a struggle and it's created a real educational gridlock. Time and time again innovative solutions have been given for school problems and they've run afoul of inflexible contracts, red tape, cumbersome bureaucracy and restrictive policies.

Let me draw a comparison for a moment, and I'd like to do that with the writing of prescriptions. Any one regulation or any one thing that the union has lobbied for in itself probably is okay, but when you put it all together, it's just too cumbersome and a mess. A physician gives a prescription, maybe for a heart problem, maybe for high blood pressure, or both, one after the other. Then they have arthritis and they give medicine for the arthritis. That irritates the stomach, so they get medicine for their stomach problem. Then a few more prescriptions come along and they go back because of another heart problem. The next thing, we have a senior with 15 to 20 prescriptions and they're literally toxic from all of these various prescriptions. What do they do? They take them off and they start all over again. What we really have now is a need to detoxify an educational patient that's in serious trouble. That's what this reform is all about: students and education trying to solve the struggle that's been going on.

Management guru Peter Drucker said when it comes to bureaucracy, if you keep track of the results, you can dispense with a lot of red tape. That indeed is what Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, is really all about, what education reform is all about. It's about giving control to parents by entrenching parent councils. Yes, there are some out there, but there are also some schools without them. It's about setting standards for quality and tracking school results. It's about improving governance of schools and school boards. It's about simplifying the financing of the education system. It's about establishing consistent, province-wide curriculum and province-wide testing systems. We're doing this by reducing the bureaucracy and removing an awful lot of the waste and duplications.

One of the problems we have is that the school system is deeply rooted into a monopoly that is enjoyed by the boards where they're the only ones who supply a school system. The result is a school system that really isn't very accountable to its customers, whether it be students, parents or ratepayers, and at any whim programs can be changed.

Essentially today there are no published statistics on how students perform or how different schools perform or how different boards perform, but we're changing that. The result is that there's really no relationship between supply and demand.

This bill will be changing and will be bringing in a funding framework, moving at least half of the education tax off the property tax, something the taxpayers have been pleading for for years and years. This particular area has been mentioned by many other speakers, but it is all about accountability.

In closing, this bill is about creating a world-class public school system in Ontario. We must be prepared to take up the challenge of continuous improvement of our education system, something that hasn't been done by previous governments for years and years. It's about accountability. It will focus the school system on achievement. By focusing on achievement of students, we will win back the public confidence in the schools in Ontario.

We will ensure through this bill that resources are in fact directed to students, who need the help the most. Through accountability it's a matter of enhancing efforts of legions of dedicated teachers and principals and parents who work so hard in the education system.

In a result-based system we will clarify who is responsible for what. We're looking at a very top-heavy, tangled governance system that desperately needs to be streamlined. With rigorous testing we will ensure that parents will finally know what their children are doing, what the educational approaches will be and where the best results will be found, which school children should be going to and which school will give the best results. That is what this bill and education reform are all about.

I can assure you it's not about unions and their demands. It's not about unions and their perks. It's not about unions and their benefits. It's not about unions and the $1,000 or so they collect in dues and it's not about the salaries of union leaders and their Taj Mahals that they have for office buildings.

It's about quality education, how to achieve educational goals. It's about students and classrooms. It's about preparing our young people for the challenges that lie ahead. Let's keep this in mind as we continue debating this particular bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): The member for Northumberland has certainly delivered in an uncritical fashion but a rather disturbingly convincing fashion the government's communications spin.

When it talks about the achievement of students or, in his words, lack of achievement of students on the international tests in the member's notes, I wonder whether it has in the notes that Ontario's students scored higher than the national average for grades 7 and 8 mathematics and data representation analysis and probability and at the national average overall for mathematics; that Ontario students performed at the international average for grade 6 science and above the international average for grade 7 science; that Ontario students scored higher than the international average in grade 8 environmental issues and the nature of science and physics; that Ontario grade 7 students scored above the national average in those areas and also scored higher in life sciences; these achievements despite the fact

that we insist on testing our entire group of students and not an élite, streamed group.

I wonder whether or not the member would have been interested in knowing that one of the areas of difficulty for our students was on the verbal components of the mathematics problems, not the solutions, and whether that might possibly raise the question in his mind of whether that has some relationship to the fact that a full 30% of our students do not have English as the language spoken at home. I wonder if that kind of question might have raised some questions about what happens to English-as-a-second-language programs when we get into the kinds of cuts that this government is looking at.

I wonder if the member would be interested in knowing the most recently reported data, which was that Ontario grade 4 students came second among a handful of jurisdictions that met the international test standards for that particular grade. I wonder how well our students have to do before somebody over there is prepared to acknowledge that the system is not broken.

But in fact it is a communications spin. I go back to a story of January 1996, when it was very clear that the Ontario government was working on a plan to dump 10,000 teachers and all they needed to put together was the communications plan to sell it to the public.

Mr Marchese: I think this is particularly relevant because I have a definition here of the word "deception" and here is the definition. "Deception: calculated deception, subterfuge, snow job, song and dance, fallaciousness, fallacy, self-deception, fond illusion, wishful thinking, wilful misconception, vision, hallucination, phantasm, mirage, will-o'-the-wisp, delusiveness" —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Fort York, can I ask about what it is you're reading from, please?

Mr Marchese: This is not a prop.

The Speaker: It's directly out of order.

Mr Marchese: Why would the words be out of order, Speaker? Just explain it to me.

The Speaker: I just asked you. I didn't hear the beginning. If they're being used as charges against the government, they're out of order.

Mr Marchese: It's the definition of "deception," Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, continue.

Mr Marchese: I'm just taking another minute to continue with that, sir.

"Befooling, tricking, kidding or putting on, spoofing or spoofery, bluffing, circumvention, overreaching, outwitting, ensnarement, entrapment and" —

The Speaker: I'm troubled by this. Are you responding to someone's speech?

Mr Marchese: Yes, I am.

The Speaker: I don't understand the relevance of this then.

Mr Marchese: The people up there —

The Speaker: Member for Fort York, it has nothing to do with the people up there. I'm seeking some relevance to the comments you're making and I can't find any.

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Mr Marchese: This was a response to le monsieur le membre du Northumberland, who spoke of nothing except using such words as bureaucracy, achievement, accountability, unions, improving, Reform Party, propaganda and the like. That's all he spoke about.

The Speaker: Further comments and questions?

Mr Jack Carroll (Chatham-Kent): I'd like to take a couple of minutes just to comment on the speech by the member for Northumberland. My concern with this issue lies in the fact that our teachers, our parents and our children seem to be content with hearing one side. I have here a piece of paper called the Teachers' Political Protest, faxed to me by a constituent of mine, brought home by her eight-year-old daughter. It contains some comments like:

"Dear Parent:

"It is difficult to know what is going on with regard to government plans for education when Snobelen changes his mind on a daily basis." I've had two teachers, the grand total of two teachers, come and ask me, "Could you tell us what the government's perspective is?"

This goes on to say: "Why are teachers going on a political protest about Bill 160? It is our final resort due to drastic government interference in education. The government legislation will dismantle publicly funded education." Brought home by an eight-year-old, sent by a teacher.

"Why it is important that only teachers teach in our schools." This is a really interesting argument. They compare themselves to doctors, and that's all well and good. The thing that they don't talk about is the fact that all medical care is not delivered by doctors. We have another category called nurses. We have lab technicians. We have all kinds of professionals in health care. Why can't we have all kinds of professionals in education?

Then they go on to say, "If the Harris government takes any more money out, education in Ontario will go the way of the dinosaur." What kind of incredible fearmongering is this to be sent home with an eight-year-old student to her parents only to hear one side of the story?

I would like to suggest that the teachers take an opportunity to hear the other side of the story before they make their decision.

Mr Bartolucci: I'd like to comment on a few of the things the member for Northumberland said. First of all, this has nothing to do with enhancing the student's opportunity to learn. This is everything about diminishing the quality of learning because of the imposition you're going to be putting on the teachers and the students of this province. You are not going to be affecting class sizes in a positive way. You are going to be affecting them only in a negative way.

I'd like the member for Northumberland to explain to the people of Ontario why, over the course of the last two years, class sizes in Ontario have mushroomed. The greatest increase in class sizes over the course of the last two years has been the responsibility of this government.

I'd like the member for Northumberland to also explain to the people of Ontario why this government has with-

drawn more money from education, $533 million, than any other government in the history of Ontario. I'd like him to explain why his government is doing that when they say they're trying to enhance the quality of education.

I would like to know from the member for Northumberland why his government is proposing to substitute certified, qualified, highly trained teachers with unqualified personnel who will try to do the job of a teacher and won't be able to. Why are they hell-bent on improving the quality of education by increasing class sizes, withdrawing $1.1 billion from education and including non-qualified personnel in the teaching profession?

I'd like the government to explain to the teachers, to the students and to the parents of Ontario how that's going to enhance education in Sudbury, Toronto or anywhere else in northern Ontario and Ontario.

The Speaker: Response, member for Northumberland.

Mr Galt: First to the member for Sudbury, why are class sizes going up? Unions negotiated. It has happened right in my own board. Class size has gone up because of negotiations.

The member for Fort William — unfortunately she has left —talked about average. That's not good enough in Ontario. I want Ontario to be the best. The Premier stated, "We'll have a world-class education here and we'll spend what it takes to have it." This is an issue not about money; it's an issue about quality education.

Just to continue for the member for Fort William from her red book: "create a core program that all students will be expected to study, set clear standards...make sure our schools prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow by stressing math and science."

"Setting high standards," "Getting ready for tomorrow's jobs," "Supporting local school councils," "proceed with the creation of a College of Teachers" — done that. "Spending less on administration," "Zero tolerance for school violence."

"Spending less on administration: Sixteen cents out of every provincial dollar and an average of 55% of property taxes are spent on education and training. We must make sure that we are getting value for our dollar." That's what this bill's all about. "As much as possible our education dollars must be spent on classroom learning rather than administration."

What have we been talking about in this bill? Exactly what the member for Fort William, the leader of the party at that time, put in her red book. "As much as possible our education dollars must be spent on classroom learning rather than administration."

This province will have world-class education regardless of what the member for Fort William says but basically because of what is in her red book and our platform.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Applause.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew North): Thank you, Margaret. I want to join the debate on the second reading of Bill 160. I do so with some trepidation because I don't believe anyone who has ever been Minister of Education can approach this subject with the kind of balance and equanimity that we would expect from people who have not been as involved as former ministers must necessarily have been.

I was struck by the previous speaker, Dr Galt. John Snobelen, he said, would go down as one of the great ministers of education. George Ross, Canon Cody, Duncan McArthur, Bill Davis, that's a pantheon of greatness to which the current minister will not, under any circumstances of objective analysis, gain entry. I am not like many who would argue that the current minister is not a bright fellow. It is because he has a substantial intelligence that his crackpot ideas are as troubling as they are.

The Speaker: Order. I just want to caution the galleries. You're there to observe and observe only. Thank you.

Mr Conway: I have watched for several —

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member for Lake Nipigon, I ask you to come to order because you're here at this point in time to observe as well.

Mr Conway: I have listened for several months —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members for Cochrane North and Durham Centre, come to order. I don't have a lot of patience tonight, so it's not going to be going —

Interjection.

The Speaker: Cochrane South. I'm sorry.

Mr Conway: I have listened for several months now as this minister, aided and abetted by his Premier, has provoked a fight that they have long wanted and the war has now come.

I spent this evening looking at the provincial press in the library and every front page across the province tells the story. "Ontario teeters on the brink of a massive disruption of our public school system." I listened carefully today, as I did yesterday, to the unvarnished, unalloyed provocation of the first minister who went out of his way, as the Minister of Labour would know better than most, to pick the fight that he has wanted for several months now. The war came and it is upon us.

Let me say in all candour, I understand the frustration of members of the government when they are faced with some of the pressures they have encountered. I chuckle, quite frankly, when I hear people like the member from Chatham and the member for Northumberland complain loudly about what their constituents are reporting from school rooms and from school yards. Yes, there are 125,000 teachers in this province and they are highly and well organized. No one knows that better than I and, unlike Mike Harris, I have been neither teacher nor trustee. For Harris to carry on as he has, knowing what some of us know about his past as both chair of a public school board and a member of a teaching staff, is to really have to hold our tongues.

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It's 20 years ago in North Bay that Mike Harris was on a school board that thought not too long about substantially increasing its pay, and who was leader of the pack? Mike Harris. It's a little hard for some of us who know something of Mr Harris's past now to listen to this

Sermon on the Mount. Is he all wrong? Of course not. There is a lot of concern in the community as there has always been.

Forty-three years ago, there was published in Canada a famous book I suspect none of you has read, but you might go up because —

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): They don't even know where to find the library.

Mr Conway: I'll be returning this to the library later this evening. One of this country's most distinguished academics, Hilda Neatby by name, wrote in 1953 a famous and controversial book called So Little for the Mind, a scathing indictment of the state of public schooling across Canada the year after I was born. Her suggestion was that if you were born and raised in the 1920s and educated in the 1930s and 1940s, you didn't know very much. In 1943, one of the most distinguished American academics wrote in the New York Times about the appalling illiteracy of American college graduates. That was in 1943. Each and every generation has had something to say about the woeful incompetence of the public schools of a preceding generation. Ours will be no different.

Don't stand here today and say, "Isn't it all terrible?" because there's nothing new in that analysis. Of course there are problems, but I want to tell you that what concerns me about Bill 160 and the policy that informs it is that the real agenda of this Harris government is nothing less than the destruction of our common school. That I will not countenance and that this Legislature must not abide.

It has been the view of the American right wing for several years now that the common school, the public school, is to be done away with, and the Canadian right-wingers have joined the cause. Conrad Black's Ottawa Citizen opines daily now about the privatization of education. Oh, they're cute and they're clever. They talk in code. They talk about vouchers, they talk about other things. But make no mistake about it —

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): Charter.

Mr Conway: Charter schools — the real agenda here in Bill 160 is the destruction of our public schools, and that's why I'll be voting against this bill.

Let me just say —

Interjections.

Mr Conway: Just as Bill Farlinger, the Premier's good friend, wants to destroy Ontario Hydro, just as Preston Manning wants to destroy the public health care system that our parents' generation built, I honestly believe that John Snobelen's and Mike Harris's real agenda is the destruction of the common school.

Interjection.

Mr Conway: Dr Hastings says I'm out to lunch. All I know is what I hear and what I see. There has been nothing but a Niagara of abuse coming forward from this minister and this Premier on the public schools since they took office two years and three months ago.

I recall that day a year or so ago when the Minister of Education went down to the Enoch Turner school and gave that speech. Quite frankly, I remember hearing that speech and thinking, "How do Liz Witmer and Dianne Cunningham stay in that cabinet?" That pup from Mississauga saying what he was saying, wilful misrepresentation of much good work that people like Liz Witmer and Dianne Cunningham had accomplished —

The Speaker: Order. "Wilful misrepresentation" is out of order.

Mr Conway: I take that back if it's unparliamentary, Mr Speaker.

But I can't imagine being a minister in a collective cabinet and saying the things that Snobelen said about the work and the accomplishments of people like Liz Witmer and Dianne Cunningham. I thought, "I'd like to be in that cabinet room." It's one thing to pick on the teacher union leadership, but to trash people who've given the kind of commitment that Liz Witmer gave to the Waterloo board of education over 15 years, for that character, that crackpot cultist to say the things —

The Speaker: It's unparliamentary and out of order. I ask you to withdraw.

Mr Conway: I withdraw, Mr Speaker, but I'm telling you, I ask my colleagues to read the speech and read some of the other things Snobelen has had to say. If that isn't cultism, I don't know what it is. Oh, the would-be Attorney General shakes his head. Let him shake his head because I suspect that Liz Witmer shook more than her head when she read the text.

The war has come. The fight is now joined. Yes, the acolytes, the ministerial wannabes are all out there saying, "Isn't it terrible that we are now being resisted by the teaching profession?" Why wouldn't you be? If you think in a free and democratic society you're going to get away with the kind of — what can I say, Mr Speaker, that would be parliamentary?

Laughter.

Mr Conway: It is no laughing matter, and I don't think the teachers should feel put upon because this right-wing crowd from New Jersey and Texas are not only anti-intellectual, they're proud of it. I mean think about it for a moment, and I guess I'll get close to the line here. Can you imagine a sophisticated province like Ontario in 1997 getting a lecture on educational rigour and intellectuality from Mike Harris and John Snobelen? Can you imagine? That would be like Conway from Renfrew giving a speech about the value of brevity.

Laughter.

Mr Conway: You ought to laugh. You ought to howl. Think about it. As Stephen Lewis would say, "Chutzpah. Snobelen and Harris on intellectual and educational rigour."

Harris's and Snobelen's parents should be brought to a committee to give testimony as to what went wrong, what could we learn from two people who have clearly got lots of brains and lots of ability. But what went wrong, I ask, because these are the people who have ascended the pulpit to lecture the rest of us about educational rigour and intellectual discipline.

I just ask people to reflect for a moment. Yes, there are problems. Let me be frank. There are aspects of the government plan that I support and I appreciate. There's no

measure that's going to come to this House that is all bad. What is bad about this is the underlining ethic and justification, the anti-common school, the anti-public school, the attack on the teachers of this province that is so wrong-headed. If we are going to make progress, we are going to have to do it as a community. If anybody thinks that we can just constantly vilify and heap abuse on the 125,000 people who on a daily basis are going to interact with two million students, I ask you on what planet you are resident.

If I've learned anything from growing up in this province, it is the value of trying to build a consensus. The difficulty with education is that it's such an obvious target for politics, and we've all done it, myself included. We've all played the politics of education. I suppose there's no surprise in that. Education has been the opportunity index for the middle class. When I think of the opportunities afforded me because Bill Davis had the guts to do the things he did in the 1960s that I certainly didn't appreciate at the time, and my parents didn't really approve of, boy, I'm eternally grateful.

It was, I think, in 1959 or 1960 that John Robarts as Minister of Education went to a graduation in Grey county, and he was astonished at how few boys were graduating from high school. Out of that experience apparently came the Robarts plan. Basically, what Robarts found that night in Owen Sound or wherever was that the plan that we were offering a lot of the farm boys of the 1950s was irrelevant. Why would you stay in school to study Latin and Shakespeare if you could go to Kitchener, Oakville or Talbotville and get a good job in the industrial plants? It was out of that analysis and experience that John Robarts developed a plan that concerned itself with a very real problem, namely relevance.

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I liked Latin and I liked Shakespeare, but most of my friends didn't. When we look at what the common school tries to do in a multifaith, multifaceted, multicultural society — Metropolitan Toronto, 1997 — compared to the world that Canon Cody or Duncan McArthur faced 60 or 70 years ago, it's a totally different reality.

When I go to Mississauga or Waterloo and look at what's there today compared to what was in Waterloo when I went to school there 25 years ago, it is fundamentally different. The challenge that is before the public schools, the common school, is enormous, but it is at the core, I submit, of our liberal, democratic society and we destroy it, we undermine it at our peril.

If we've got anything to learn from the great American republic, it is exactly that. How much of the American middle class has now left the common school? A great deal of it. If that starts to happen in the rural Ottawa Valley or if it starts to happen in downtown Ottawa, in Thunder Bay, in Clarkson, in Port Credit or in New Dundee, I'm telling you, we are going to pay a very heavy price.

I say to the teacher leadership, listen carefully to what the people are saying. You don't have to be Albert Einstein to know, as many in the government have rightly observed, that there is an ongoing anxiety about much of what's happening. Interesting it is. As usual, most people have a high degree of anxiety about the system as a whole and have a much more comfortable feeling about their school and their teachers.

I have my concerns and my complaints. One place where I think the government is absolutely right, I think the monopoly of the teaching profession on counselling ought to end. We have not done a good job. We have to do a much better job in counselling the young people growing up in my part of the province and elsewhere as to what's out there and what's going to be required to get into those kinds of jobs and what kind of educational experiences are going to be necessary. The educational monopoly on counselling at the secondary level must end. That is not to say that teachers and people in formal education will not and should not have an important role to play. That must continue. But we've got to think a lot more creatively about how we can meet those needs in the community, and not just for economic but for social reasons.

We have to seriously think about the way in which we bring people into the teaching profession, the way we support them once they're there. I'm not happy, quite frankly, about the state of affairs at some of our faculties of education. I think it's a very uneven world. Some of them do a very good job; others, I think, are less successful.

When I think back to my four years as minister, I spent altogether too much time on the issues of educational finance and governance and very little time on issues like teacher recruitment, teacher training, teacher support. We need to be much, much more thoughtful and creative on that subject.

When I think back, and I'm sure most members will agree with me, what is it that produces the result we all want in terms of educational achievement? Let me tell you what all the research tells us, and it hasn't changed much over the decades: a student who comes from a home environment in which the learning experience is cherished and nurtured, a school environment where the teacher at the front of the class or in the resource centre or in the schoolyard is a very creative and committed person and a community that cares about education for its own sake. If those ingredients are present, you can get by with not much of a gym and not much of a resource centre. You can have the best building in the world and if you don't have the home support, the teacher commitment and the community involvement, you will not get the result you want, we all want.

Some of the most serious challenges this society faces have much less to do with school than they do with home and community. This is very thin ice and the hour is late, but thoughtful observers make that point on a daily basis. If you want to see an X-ray of trouble in the community, I can take you there very easily, and the Minister of Labour could do so perhaps even more so.

Are there troubles? Yes. Is there an opportunity to move forward? Yes. But we will not do so if our agenda is to attack and to abuse some of the key people without whose commitment and support we cannot move forward. I say again very seriously, I oppose Bill 160 because I honestly and truly believe that the real agenda of the

Snobelen-Harris approach is to literally destroy the common school in Ontario.

The Speaker: Comments?

Mr Pouliot: Always a pleasure indeed to respond in the short time allocated to our best orator in this House, the member for Renfrew North.

You profess, members of the government, that all is wrong with the education system and yet our houses of excellence are recognized the world over. I only wish following the remarks of our distinguished friend and colleague that you would look at the education system the way the world looks at it. You are a product of that system and you will admit to yourselves and to others that you've done very well by the system. But you have chosen to invent, to provoke a crisis, and two members of prominence, the Minister of Education and the bedmate, the Premier, dimmed the light one day, scared one another and said, "We must take them on; they must make our day."

It's all engineered. It's all architecture. This is not the way you bring the best out of anyone. This is all about money — nothing else. It's about the city of Toronto, both hands in the cookie jar. It's about Ottawa. It's about putting the teachers back in line. You should have to carry the guilt. You're dealing with the human dimension of the most importance, that of our future, and you will be judged very harshly. When you make a deal with the doctors because they're more fortunate and you trust they belong to the strongest union, and then you go nudge, nudge, wink, wink with the police because you need the protection, what about those who prepare society for tomorrow? Think about it.

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): I want to compliment the member for Renfrew North for again a most eloquent and moving rendition. However, again noticeably absent is what he and his party would do differently. I have yet to hear from anyone on that side of the House what they would do differently, especially from the member for Renfrew North, who was himself a former education minister in this province.

I recall vividly sitting on that side of the House, raising issues of concern, but I'll tell you several things that minister was responsible for in this province. He now talks about how he would make contributions to education in Ontario, but during his five-year period, what did we have to show for it? Yes, we implemented full funding for separate school funding, something which this government paid a very heavy price 12 years ago for bringing in. But it was none the less the right thing to do in this province, and the member opposite was largely responsible for its full implementation.

But I'll tell you that we had a funding formula in this province which clearly distinguished the dollars that went to elementary schools, the dollars that went to special education and the dollars that went to secondary schools. It was the Liberal government and the minister in question who blended all of those together into one transfer grant. For years we'd worked hard to create, to upset the imbalance, to destroy the inequity between elementary and secondary teachers in this province, and under his reign we saw the widening of that gap and less accountability.

Sure, there was a conversion on the road to Damascus from the then Leader of the Opposition and her red book is filled with rhetorical comments, many of which are being implemented in this bill, incidentally. But I want to remind the member that the unprecedented attack on the teachers' pension plan in this province, something that they've worked hard for, deserve and should be getting —

The Speaker: Thank you. Questions or comments?

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Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I want to commend the member for Renfrew North on an outstanding speech in the Legislature this evening. If I could draw from one thing he said that I think is of great significance, it is the tradition we have in this province of trying to build a consensus.

I know you think that perhaps when the previous Conservative government was in power, we weren't as effusive in our praise of that government at the time, and that is true. But I must tell you that the people I look back at, ministers of education in the past such as Bob Welch and Tom Wells, and Bill Davis and John Robarts tried to build that consensus. It's very attractive. It's extremely attractive, particularly when the polls aren't what you would like them to be, when the government seems to be under fire, to find an enemy, to pick on a group in society that the brain trust in the Premier's office believes perhaps some people resent. But you really don't build the kind of consensus you need to make a province work when you do that.

The people who are on the front line have a sense of morale now which is as low as I've ever seen it. I know many of these people on a personal basis and the challenges they're facing daily in the classrooms in the schools of the province are indeed very difficult challenges. I'm sure most of them would like to work together with legislators, with members of government to make the education system the kind of system all of us would really like to see, but when we have the Premier picking a fight with them, saying as he did in the newspaper yesterday, "We're saying school boards and unions are not trusted to deliver quality education," when you make that kind of statement, that truly does not pay tribute to the trustees who have worked very hard in the past to bring about good education, our various boards and the teachers who have delivered that service on the front line.

Mr Marchese: I too congratulate the member for Renfrew and agree with 90% of what he said. I have some points of disagreement and I'll mention those as quickly as I can.

I agree that M. Harris, with M. Snobelen, has done a great deal to destabilize the educational system, has done a great deal to demoralize the teachers, has done a great deal to punish trustees and to blame them for some of the problems we have and has indeed confused the parents a whole lot.

On the whole issue the member for Renfrew talks about, the elimination of the educational monopoly on

counselling and that it must end: I do not agree with that. That's one serious point of disagreement. If counsellors are not doing an effective job, then we need to help the principal and those teachers to perhaps do it better, but to say they have a monopoly or to suggest that somehow there is a problem in that regard, I have a serious point of disagreement in that regard.

On the matter of research, let me add some thoughts to that. Effective learning: Research shows that where you have a principal who is a good curriculum leader, an effective leader in terms of understanding how children learn, a school where teachers are excited about teaching in that school, a school which involves parents in the learning, that school will produce results unlike any other school. That is the research on effective learning and that research means you must involve teachers in that educational change. If you are not involving the teachers, then you've got it all wrong.

That's why I tell you Bill 160 moves in the wrong direction. It does not speak to the quality of education because you have effectively shut out the teachers in that process, and without them, the people you do not trust to do the job, it will not succeed.

The Speaker: Response?

Mr Conway: I want to begin by agreeing with the previous speaker. There will not be change in this system if the teaching profession is not part of it. Teachers are absolutely critical. You cannot abuse them and attack them and condemn them one day and expect that the next day they're going to be part of a brave, new and better world. There can be no disagreement on that.

I want to agree with some of the observations made by Mr Jackson about my failures as minister. I could have added a few to the list. There's no doubt that when I look back on my experience, the difficulties we had implementing minority language education and, most especially, the extended funding to the separate school system were much greater than any of us ever imagined. It was more complicated, more time-consuming and certainly much more expensive than the architects imagined.

I look at the current government's policy on education and what is it basically? It's about concentrating more power at the centre, in this case at the department of education, and having larger units of organization. God, did we learn nothing from the 1960s? One of the big, unintended consequences of some of those reforms a generation ago is that that kind of consolidation gave the following results that nobody wanted: more bureaucracy, more centralization, more separation between parent, child and the system, and higher costs. So we are now embracing the very things we ought not to be embracing.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Centralizing everything at Queen's Park.

The Speaker: Member for Algoma.

Mr Conway: Of course. I'm not saying that the status quo is perfect. Nobody is, but have we learned nothing from the mistakes of the past or, put more charitably, the unintended results of the consolidation of the late 1960s and early 1970s?

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bisson: I have a mere 10 minutes because of the new rules of this assembly to try to sum —

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Well, it's the truth. You guys have muzzled the opposition, you're trying to muzzle our teachers, you're muzzling —

The Speaker: Order, member for Cochrane South. Members of the government, please come to order. Member for Scarborough Centre. Thank you.

Mr Bisson: To make the point, they even try to bully people when it comes to being able to express their views. But in 10 minutes I will try to bring this debate to what I think is a crucial point.

I want members of this assembly and parents who are members of this assembly to think of what was happening in the classroom but two years ago, what was happening in the classroom five years ago. When I went into the riding in the communities I represent and I went into the classrooms, I saw teachers who were engaged in education and for the largest part children who wanted to learn. You saw people who were concerned about how we can work together to make sure that education happens in our schools in a way that's conducive to good education and a healthy atmosphere. People were less concerned back then, students, teachers, parents, trustees, secretaries and custodians, about what was going to happen when it came to the government and the kind of attack we're seeing today.

Two years later, as we walk into those schools, as I go into Flora MacDonald school in Timmins or I go into St Anne school or whatever school it might be in my riding, what do I see? I see students who are concerned about what this government is doing to education and what it threatens to do by way of its policies. I see teachers who are worried about what it means to their ability to teach children. I see principals, trustees and administrators who worry about how they're going to be able to provide the education that is needed for the children of Ontario to build the economy of tomorrow.

Why? Because this Conservative government, the Mike Harris government of Ontario, has decided they're going to have a war, and that war is going to be in the education system, and particularly it's going to be with teachers, because some people have decided in the Premier's office, according to the polls they're doing, that they can take teachers on and in some way polarize politics in Ontario for their particular need.

I say to you, government members, shame on you, because the pawn in this game is not the teachers, it's not the parents; it's the kids we're supposed to be here to represent and teach, and that's what you guys are up to. I would bow my head in shame if I were a member of a government that undertakes that kind of agenda.

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You think I'm making this up, but let's back up to two years ago. I remember the Minister of Education, on being appointed, meeting with the bureaucrats within the Ministry of Education and having the gall to tape it because he

wanted to show this to all the educators and bureaucrats who were working within the Ministry of Education, and what did he have to say? "I want to create a crisis in education so that I can implement the kinds of change that I and my party want to impose on Ontario in its education system."

I say to the Minister of Education and to this government, you're wrong and you're going dead in the wrong direction, because what our system of education is about, and I bring it back to the point, is making sure the people in our education system and our students are in an atmosphere where they're able to learn. That's what this is all about.

When I see a Minister of Education undergo the kind of language he uses to describe our system of education and when I see him and other ministers of the government and the Premier make comments such as, "Teachers and boards of education cannot be trusted to run our system of education," I worry about what it means to my children and I worry about what it means to the Ontario we're going to be leaving them. If we can't trust teachers and we can't trust the trustees to run the system, what the heck does that say about this government and what does it say about our system of education? I say you have it wrong.

The people who run for boards and the people who teach in our schools are there primarily because they want to make sure our kids have the quality education they need to be able to grow, to be able to learn and then later to get into the workforce and compete in this new economy we have today.

What really galls me is that this government is exploiting the language of change and progress as a smokescreen to do two things. The first thing is to take $1 billion out of our system of education — that's what you're up to — on top of the $800 million you've already taken out, because if you can create the crisis, if you can make the kinds of accusations you make about all people in education and make the erroneous comment that our system of education is broken and doesn't work, you're then able to go under the smokescreen of saying that you're going to make changes and pull $1 billion out of the system of education.

What is of even more concern to me that was touched on earlier by the previous speaker is that this government, under the smokescreen of exploiting the language of change and progress, is trying to implement a right-wing agenda when it comes to our system of education. That, simply put, is my kids, the kids of the average working people in this province who over the years to come are going to have two choices: You go to a system of public education that is underfunded, that is under attack and that is besieged and you get less education; or if you've got the bucks, if you're the friend of Mike Harris, of Elizabeth Witmer and the rest of this gang, you're going to be able to send your kids off to some private school that will have more dollars to provide for the education.

I say to you that is wrong. We have built this nation and this province on the premise that each kid going into school has the same opportunity as much as is humanly possible, that through the development of education and through the learning process they can compete equally with their peers so that when they come out of the education system at the other end, at least they've gotten a fair shot. But if you deliver a system of education that basically says that you've only got a good system if you've got the bucks and you've got a lesser system if you're in the public system, you're shutting out the very people we need to assist to be able to make our economy work.

I want to remind this government of something when they talk about this whole notion that this system of education is broken and it needs to be fixed. The United Nations for how many years running has said that Canada and Ontario are the best places in the world to live? Do you think that doesn't happen with a good system of education? Do you think you can build the kind of economy — you think that's funny, but it ain't funny. How do you build a modern economy, how do you develop the kinds of people who are necessary to compete in our economy and make us productive and make us world leaders when it comes to trade and export if we don't have a system of education that prepares our kids and puts them on an equal footing and allows them to go out into the marketplace to compete? By God, if somebody understands that, I hope it's the Conservative Party, or should I say the Reform Party, of Ontario? But no, you guys believe in quite the opposite: one system of education for those kids who have the bucks, whose parents are rich, and another system of education for the rest of us. I say you're totally wrong when you're going in that direction.

In the two minutes I have left I ask, what is this government trying to do now? They're trying to provoke a confrontation with teachers to polarize their system. In the end, whom are you hurting? You're hurting the kids who are in the system we're supposed to be there to serve. If you do that, you're not letting down teachers, you're not letting down parents; you're letting down the kids. If you were elected here to do one thing, it's to make sure that our kids in our Ontario are able to grow up and live in the same kind of province that we've got and not some kind of Ontario that in the future will be somewhat less than what we had growing up as children.

If I have a responsibility as a legislator and as a social democrat, it's to ensure that my kids tomorrow inherit the Ontario I was born into, the Ontario I grew up in, the Ontario in which I had a public system of education that allowed me to get the development and the skills needed so that one day I could compete in the workplace, so that one day I could participate in the economy, and by God, yes, so that one day I could come into this Legislature and represent the people of Cochrane South, represent the views and aspirations of the working men and women of that riding.

When you deny children the opportunity to develop their education, when you deny children the opportunity to participate, you're saying to many children in the future, "You're not going to have the same opportunity that Gilles and other people had before you," because Mike Harris of Ontario wants to leave to our children an

Ontario that is less than the one I inherited as I grew up in this province.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Tom Froese (St Catharines-Brock): I'd like to make comments on the member for Cochrane South. When we talk about education changes in our province, everybody wants to lay blame on everybody else. We want to blame successive governments, parents blame the system, students blame the teachers, teachers blame their union bosses, the union bosses blame the government; it's all one big circle.

I wish, when we discuss education, all of us could just get rid of the rhetoric. There were comments earlier about studies that were made. We've actually studied this whole thing to death. There are studies upon studies that the education system needs to change. In the last election, in 1995, the Common Sense Revolution was there, the Liberal red book was there, and before that the NDP Royal Commission on Learning. If you look at the documents, they all say the same thing. Then we have the Education Improvement Commission and it repeats the same thing.

Repeatedly, we have said as a government that it has been studied to death and now it's time to act. I'm challenging the opposition, I'm challenging the Liberals and the NDPs, I'm challenging the teachers and the parents. I'd like to challenge everyone to give input on how you make those changes instead of just sitting there and saying all the rhetoric. Give some recommendations. Why don't you come forward and put into print your recommendations from your red book? I'm sick and tired of listening to all the rhetoric. Put forward recommendations. We've repeatedly said that we wanted recommendations and that we would act on them.

Mrs McLeod: Stable funding. No cuts, Tom. It's easy.

Mr Pouliot: The minister wants to steal the money.

The Speaker: Member for Lake Nipigon, would you please come to order, as well as the member for Fort William.

Mrs McLeod: I've already been out once today.

The Speaker: Well, apparently you were out once yesterday.

Mrs McLeod: Yesterday, that's right. That's why that —

The Speaker: That's right. Questions or comments?

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming): I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Cochrane South for his impassioned speech in defence of the education system and necessary changes that are required. I'd like to address a point that I think teachers are being unduly criticized for, and this is what I would call non-teaching time.

It's interesting, when we get up here and make a 20-minute speech or a five-minute speech, that we expect teachers to somehow be up in front of a class six, seven, eight hours a day without preparation time, without all the resources we have in our offices. When we do a 20-minute speech we have staff resources galore, personal and in our caucuses and in our research bureaus, to help us. Yet we expect our teachers, and now without very much preparation time at all, to come out before 25, 30, 35, 36, maybe 37 children, very exuberant and energetic children, and teach a whole day and bring them into the world of knowledge.

This government had better re-examine what it's trying to do here and really try to understand the importance of education and the importance of preparation that a teacher requires.

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We also have our professional development time. You seem to be down on teachers for their professional development. Every profession needs to grow and succeed. We do that in our business with our various retreats a couple of times a year. Every profession needs that time to renew. I don't know why the officials of this government want to somehow just pick on teachers, people who are so dedicated.

My eldest daughter just got her first teaching job a few weeks ago and she's working very hard at it. I'm very proud that she picked a profession that is going to pass on the collective wisdom of humankind to our next generation. It's an important job and all of us in this House should be supporting our teachers.

Interruption.

The Speaker: There is no applauding in the galleries. Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: Would that it would be the case that we all had an equal amount of preparation time around here, because the Tories have unlimited resources for preparation time, the Liberals have less and we have a whole lot less. We pass papers on to each other to assist each other. Would that were the case.

I want to tell you, on the whole issue of preparation time, part of what my colleague said has to do with the desire for this government to take money out of the system. That's what it's about. We believe it's $1 billion. Preparation time is your one area to do so. I am convinced that some of these people on the other side understand preparation time is a critical part of learning. I'm convinced some of them understand it. But it needs to be subsumed under the desire to take money out of the system. When you get rid of 50% of the preparation time of high school teachers, what does it mean? It means $225 million and the firing of possibly 6,000 teachers, give or take. That's what it means. How does firing 6,000 teachers help you to improve the quality of education? It doesn't, other than taking approximately $225 million to $250 million. That's what it's about. That's the game. We understand it.

Part of the game, Speaker, that I'm afraid you understand too, is that with the desire of this government to undermine the public school system, what it is doing is to eliminate the confidence that people have in the public system, thereby running to a private system because if you underfund it, if you eviscerate the funding of public schools, they inevitably will have to go to private schools. That, I believe, is what underpins part of the agenda of that Tory government right there.

Mr Carroll: I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments on the member for Cochrane South. It's

interesting he mentioned that if he were a member of this caucus he would hang his head in shame. I guess what he's suggesting then is that their system of arbitrarily going in and whacking 5% out in the social contract is the fair way to do things. Quite frankly, we disagree with that. We think that's very unfair, so we've changed it, and we're going to do it a little different way.

When you sit in the opposition benches in this place you can say absolutely anything you want, it doesn't have to be factual, and you're not held responsible for it. The member from Cochrane said that our intention is to take $1 billion out of education. Neither the Premier nor the Minister of Education has ever said that. However, the teachers' unions have decided they want to believe what the opposition says and they have written home to the parents and said, "They intend to cut another $1 billion out of education no matter what." The only place teachers' unions could have heard that was from the opposition, of course, who do not have to be held responsible for that.

The member for Renfrew South said it's important we get this right, and I agree with him. It is important that we sit down and discuss it. I would implore the teachers to remember that their unions have a motivation to collect dues and to keep their membership up. Why don't they sit down, talk with their members —

Interruption

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I don't want to tell the galleries again. If there's any noise, I will clear the galleries. You're here to observe and it's a privilege to be here, not a right. I will not warn you again.

Mr Carroll: I invite all the teachers to sit down with their members of Parliament and get the other side of the story so they can understand our motivation.

The Speaker: Response?

Mr Bisson: To the member for Chatham-Kent, what hogwash. I can tell you what we're doing. We're sitting down and meeting with teachers. I wish you'd try to do the same in your own ridings. From what I understand from discussions that I had with teachers across this province, you do everything to run away and not to listen to what teachers, parents and others have to say about what's happening to this system.

To the members for Fort York and Timiskaming, a good point in regard to preparation time and it's something I think is well taken.

To the member for St Catharines-Brock, for him to stand and to say that the royal commission had as its goal to take $1 billion out of education is the largest misrepresentation and the largest stretch — I won't go any further than that, Speaker.

Mr Froese: I never said that. Come on, be fair.

The Speaker: Withdraw.

Mr Bisson: I withdraw "stretch." You know what I was getting at. Let your mind wander that way. But the point I'm —

The Speaker: Member for Cochrane South, I don't find that humorous. I just want you to withdraw it. I'm not here to have a debate with you.

Mr Bisson: I withdraw, Speaker. I apologize, I withdraw.

The point is that the royal commission talked about reinvesting and putting money into education. That's what the royal commission talked about because it recognized that to prepare our kids for the economy of tomorrow and to make sure they have a place in it, you have to invest in the early years and you have to invest in a system of education to make sure they get there.

I just want to — on one of the things, I didn't get the opportunity in the 10 minutes, and it was touched on by the member for Chatham-Kent — touch on the comments the Premier himself made about the system of education. This really says everything about where this government is coming from. This is a quote from Mike Harris himself: "Premier Mike Harris has charged Ontario has a mediocre system of education and neither teachers, unions nor school boards can be trusted to improve it." I'll tell you something. I will trust teachers, I will trust trustees, I will trust parents and others before I trust the Mike Harris government any day when it comes to reforming the system of education and making it work for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): I rise tonight and I welcome the opportunity to comment briefly on Bill 160. I have a rather unique position in this House because I believe I am the only member, certainly on this side of the House, who has come directly from the high school system. I come as a graduate of the Ontario school system and a teacher in the Ontario school system of approximately 25 years. I think it's important to look at that in the context then of the discussion this evening.

My experience as a classroom teacher and as a member of this political party frankly drove me to make the decision to run as a candidate. I served as a member of the policy council on education because it became very clear to me, as it has to many others, that there are significant problems with the way in which education has been run in the last few years. So it is with that kind of a context and that kind of background that I come this evening to make a few comments.

It's very clear to me, as it is to others, that we have an extremely important challenge before us. It's quite clear to those of us in my generation who grew up in an Ontario that was the most prosperous province in what is clearly, by the measurement of many, the greatest country in the world. It becomes very clear to us that it is important to ensure a future in this province that is as bright and prosperous and as full of hope for our children as the Ontario that we have known. That, quite frankly, is the challenge that we all recognize. That is why, when we look at this legislation and the commitment of this government, it is our focus to look at changing the system. It is the system that is failing. We are simply not getting enough dollars and support into the classroom to support our teachers.

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The need for reform is very clear. It has been outlined in 24 separate reviews of the system since 1950. There

have been two royal commissions, 10 commissions and committees, two fact-finding reports, two panels and innumerable meetings of parents and educators across the province.

What comes out of that is that we have some very clear strengths in recognizing those problems; first of all, the kind of teachers that we have produced. Many of the speakers this evening have referenced the particular quality, the leadership that those teachers have provided regardless of who was in political office at the time. It's very clear that teachers have provided the kind of leadership, the dedication and the expertise that has given our children in this province the kind of footing they needed. It's also very clear that the students of this province are also our strength. They're a strength in establishing the opportunities for tomorrow as well.

The third strength is that of the commitment. It was very clear in the election of 1995 that our commitment was to classroom education and to review the kinds of difficulties that the system had provided for teachers and for students. It was very clear that governance, finance and the system were the problems that needed addressing. In governance we have looked at Bill 104, and in finance we're looking at a per-student allocation that clearly identifies a problem that has existed for many, many years when you look at the inequities that financing in the previous method provided.

This legislation that we are looking at today provides fair funding of school boards and establishes the authority for the province to control education tax rates. Taxes will stay in the community where they are raised. The minister has committed to stable funding throughout the transition process, but we intend to change education funding to meet the needs of students. Everyone who has studied education funding in this province has come to the same conclusion: By basing education funding on inequitable property taxes, we have not provided every child in the province the same chance to receive a first-class education.

Currently, property taxes do not bear any direct relation to the cost of educating children in each community. In communities where property assessments and taxes are higher, education is funded more richly than it is in much of rural Ontario, where property assessments tend to be lower. In recognition of the need to change education funding to reflect the needs of students, the minister is proposing to take a greater responsibility for education funding at the provincial level.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Order. Order. I'll not warn you again.

Mrs Munro: While property owners will pay less for education through their municipal taxes, the province will pay more through grants to school boards.

At the same time the minister has said he wants to assume responsibility for more education funding, the government is responding to the report recommendation of the Education Improvement Commission to limit class size. It's rather interesting that so many people have always referred to class size as an important feature, important in terms of delivery of the best education. In this way, we can ensure that resources go directly to the classroom, where they can increase student achievement.

One of the important aspects of this allocation model is that we are going to build an education budget from the bottom up that will include dedicated funding for classroom expenditures, including the costs of teachers and educational assistants, preparation time, texts, learning materials, computers, guidance, libraries, school-based administration, and professional supports such as school psychologists. This foundation grant will be supplemented by seven special-purpose grants to recognize the different circumstances faced by students and school boards, and a school building grant to pay for the cost of heating, lighting, maintaining and constructing schools.

We know that our education system is one that needs addressing. We know that we have the resources. We know that we have the staff. We know that we have the dedication of those people who have given their professional lives to helping our students. This is the challenge for all of us in the next century. We must work together, then, to be able to provide the support for this kind of opportunity for our children.

It becomes very clear when you look at the fact that we must change our focus. It must be on changing the system; it must be on providing the dollars and support into the classroom to support our teachers.

The need for reform and how to make it happen has widely been discussed for decades. It is now time to act on that. We have a very straightforward goal: to have the highest level of student achievement in Canada. It makes it very clear for us that our students come first.

M. Bernard Grandmaître (Ottawa-Est) : Tout le monde est d'accord ce soir. Même les membres du gouvernement disent qu'une réforme du système d'éducation en Ontario est nécessaire. Alors, je me pose la question en tant que francophone : si une réforme est nécessaire, pourquoi est-ce que le gouvernement ne parle pas aux professeurs, aux conseillers scolaires et à la population de l'Ontario ?

Moi, comme francophone, j'ai toujours subi les coups du gouvernement, et je parle des coups durs. On parle maintenant du financement de 12 conseils de langue française additionnels en Ontario. Dans la loi 160, est-ce que vous parlez du financement de ces 12 conseils additionnels ? Pas un mot. C'est une promesse vide.

Qu'est-ce que vous voulez ? Vous voulez encercler tout le pouvoir de l'éducation en Ontario et vous satisfaire en coupant des argents, couper un milliard additionnel. Si les gens de l'Ontario ne sont pas aveugles, et j'en suis sûr, ils voient très clair que M. Harris et M. Snobelen ont un agenda tout à fait spécial. C'est de ruiner le système en place et de mettre en place leur système et l'appauvrir au niveau public aussi bien que séparé. Alors, j'implore M. Snobelen et M. Harris de se réveiller.

I want to finish in English so you'll understand. I want to tell your minister and I want to tell your Premier to

smarten up, because the people of Ontario are much smarter than you think they are.

Mr Wildman: I want to respond to the comments of the member for Durham-York, who spoke as a former teacher and someone who obviously is concerned about education. I don't understand, though, how she can support a government whose Minister of Education and Training continually attacks the very people who have to implement the reform in order to benefit the students in the province. How is it that she believes that by demoralizing the teaching profession we can improve the quality of education in this province? It's completely ridiculous; it's counterproductive. The member says that we must put more money into education. If that is the case, why is it that the minister and the Premier of this province will not commit — today they refused to make a guarantee that any savings that accrued from restructuring of the education system and school boards would be reinvested in education. Why is it that the Premier would not make that commitment today? Why is it that he would not guarantee that he will not take more money out of the classroom and out of the school system?

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Bill 104, which he mentioned, was an attack on the trustees and on school boards. What Bill 160 is about is concentrating power, control over the education system, here at Queen's Park, taking away from local control over education and local accountability. The member says we must have a funding formula that meets the needs of the students, but we do not yet have that funding formula. We don't know what the government is going to say in terms of how much money they're actually going to take out of education or put into it to benefit our students in this province. We should know that before this bill passes.

The member talked about limiting class size, but she forgets that the Education Improvement Commission recommended that all the money saved from restructuring should be reinvested in education. You can't do this by cutting prep time and laying off teachers. You are out to save money, and that's your main raison d'être.

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Centre): It's my pleasure to rise in response to the member for Durham-York, who brings a very unique perspective on education to this House from the government side. I want to say what a pleasure it has been to have been able to sit beside her for the last two years and to discuss many issues, including education. I appreciate the perspective she brings to it.

In my riding of Scarborough Centre, yes, there are teachers, yes, there are vice-principals and, yes, there are principals who are opposed to this bill. But let me tell you about the teachers and vice-principals and principals who are in favour of this bill, who have come to my office and spoken to me about being in favour of the reforms this government is bringing forward.

Mr Bisson: All those in favour, please stand up. What planet did you visit?

The Acting Speaker: Order. I'll not warn you again.

Mr Newman: What's important to keep in mind is that every single member of this House has the same goal: a quality education system. I think teachers feel the same way; I feel every member of this Legislature feels the same way. What differs is in how we get there. The opposition feels that the more money you spend, the better education system you have.

Mr Bisson: You think investing in education is bad.

Mr Newman: That's the way they feel. Coming from the NDP, who spent $50 billion more than they took in in revenue during their five years of terror in this province, they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

The goal is the same. We've brought forward reforms that have reduced the number of trustees, have reduced the number of school boards, have brought forward the College of Teachers and Education Quality and Accountability Office.

When you listen to the opposition, you would think we were in an education utopia, that the education system was working.

Mr Bisson: It is working. Look at the kids who are graduating. What system did you come out of?

Mr Newman: Well, let me tell you, in the 1995 election, people said loud and clear to me, in Scarborough Centre, that the education system was not working.

Interjection.

Mr Newman: I just want to close by saying that we do have the greatest teachers in the world teaching in Ontario, and I want to let them know that.

The Acting Speaker: I am naming the member, Mr Bisson, from Cochrane North.

Mr Bisson: I'm from Cochrane South.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the member to leave.

Mr Bisson was escorted from the chamber.

Mr Wildman: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member across the way, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, made a comment which was completely unacceptable in this House and must withdraw. He suggested that the member for Cochrane South —

The Acting Speaker: Please take your seat.

Mr Wildman: I'm allowed to continue and complete what I have to say.

The Acting Speaker: No, I'm sorry, you're not. Please take your seat.

You've asked me to make a ruling on your point of order. I didn't hear any comment, but if the minister said something he shouldn't have, I'm giving him this opportunity to withdraw it.

Hon William Saunderson (Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism): If it was unparliamentary, I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Fort William.

Mrs McLeod: I rather wish that the beliefs of the member for Durham-York had some relevance to her government's agenda rather than being wishful thinking. She has suggested tonight that the government is going to be putting more money into education.

The fact is that at the present time, the funding formula is shown to generate $1.1 billion less for education. That's on top of the $1 billion that's already been taken out. If there is any member opposite who does not believe that is the case, they should ask their Minister of Education and their Premier to make a commitment today to no further cuts in education. You will not get that commitment, because $1.1 billion is the goal of this government for cost reduction in education.

The member for Durham-York has given us some views, refreshing from the other side, on the quality of teacher leadership. I'm glad to at least hear her saying that after what the Premier has said in the most incredibly provocative way in the last 24 hours, his statement that you cannot trust teachers or trustees to provide a quality of education. I have found it appalling that the Minister of Education, the Premier and now members tonight, who are reading the briefing provided to them by the minister, will say that the reason we have higher class sizes is because teachers have negotiated them. It's an incredible statement.

The Premier used the example of the Lakehead board. I want it on record tonight that the Lakehead Board of Education teachers, elementary and secondary, have had no salary increases for five years, no benefit increases for five years. Was there an increase in grades 3 to 8 of one person per class? Yes, there was. Why was that negotiated? Because it was the only way to save junior kindergarten after the $145 million in cuts to JK from this government.

That is exactly what's going to happen when this government gets total and absolute control of education. We will have more cuts; we will not have smaller class sizes; we will have the loss of virtually all outside-the-classroom support for students, because that will be the only way that they can deal with the cuts this government is bringing in.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It has just been alleged that the Premier said he was opposed to teachers and trustees. He said unions and —

The Acting Speaker: Member for Mississauga South, please take your seat. That is not a point of order.

The Chair recognizes the member for Durham-York for her two-minute response.

Mrs Munro: I want to respond to a couple of the points that were made. The first one I would like to respond to is the fact that we are looking at 12 French-language district school boards, which will replace the existing four French-language boards.

I also want to refer to the comment made by the member for Algoma. I think the important thing to keep in mind is that it is from the opposition that we hear the numbers. The Premier has made it very clear on a number of occasions, and so has the minister, that our commitment is to the quality of education and that it will be what is necessary. That is the commitment that has been made by both of these people.

As for the power he referred to in the area of Queen's Park, I have to speak as a classroom teacher who watched the proliferation of boards and the kinds of things that were done because of the fact that each board had to reinvent all their curriculum outlines, all their work. That's the kind of duplication that I think all of us would suggest is unnecessary.

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The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bradley: I begin by indicating my great disappointment that the change in the procedural rules of this House has confined members at this point in the debate to only 10 minutes to deal with a bill which has 219 pages, with a lot of detail and a lot of measures which will have a profound impact on Ontario.

I have indicated in this House on many occasions that despite the fact there are very significant bills that have implications for our province, the most important legislative measure undertaken by this government was to change the rules in the middle of the game; that is, to change the procedural rules to severely restrict debate on any piece of legislation and thereby transfer power from elected members of the Legislature who are accountable to the people who elect us, to the unelected people, largely the backroom advisers in the Office of the Premier. This will be important not only for this Parliament and this government but also for future parliaments and future governments. We have reduced the importance of elected members of this Legislature. We have seen an attack on democracy, with that power being concentrated in the hands of unelected people. That of course affects not only those of us on this side but members of the government side as well.

This bill in itself demonstrates that by the fact that it allows so many changes to be made by regulation; that is, changes that are not approved by this House but are simply done behind closed doors in the rooms of the cabinet and ultimately signed by the Premier of this province. In a healthy democracy, as many as possible of the decisions we make should be made in this Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, under the rule changes and under the provisions of this bill, that cannot happen.

What I am most disappointed about is the strategy of the government to divide and conquer at a time when we should be trying to develop consensus in this province. There is an effort now to divide members of the teaching profession from those who are in the public sector who are not part of the teaching profession.

There was a full government retreat on Bill 136, a retreat which I applaud, because I think the government was wrong in the first place in including the provisions it did in that piece of legislation. But clearly now the government wishes to divide that group from those who are in the teaching profession. They have decided, when there's difficulty for the government, when they're in a state of panic, when they appear to be without a direction, that they have to find an enemy and start a war. That is essentially what is happening with this legislation and with the rhetoric we're hearing from the Premier of the province and the Minister of Education.

I look at the fact that in years gone by, some of the members of this House who have served as trustees have made a significant contribution to this province; some who are members of the teaching profession have made a direct contribution in the classrooms of Ontario. Yet we are now seeing the government turning trustees, in some cases, against teachers, when of course the common enemy, if you will, is the provincial government, which is severely withdrawing funds from the education system.

The minister said it best in terms of revealing the government agenda when he said the government was out to create a crisis in education so it could make drastic and radical changes to the education system, changes which do not reflect a consensus in the province but, rather, reflect a narrow, very right-wing agenda which can be found easily in many states south of the border in the United States.

The government is determined that it's going to get another $1 billion out of the education system. It's an education system that is different from that in the 1950s. Unfortunately, in education most of us think back to the days when we were in school and to situations that existed a number of years ago. It has changed drastically. I have not been a teacher in a classroom now for over 20 years, but I know, from talking to the people on the front line, those who deliver education services, that it's a far different group of students they deal with today. There are a lot more challenges out there. Teachers are asked to do far more. The atmosphere is significantly different from what it was when I was in the classroom.

When we start to attack members of the teaching profession — and I know the target is always the head of the teachers' federations, because that's an easy target. When we start attacking those people, we reduce the morale to the lowest level it has ever been. We need the support and enthusiastic involvement of members of the teaching profession to make our education system function as we all hope it would. Yet the rhetoric that is taking place clearly demonstrates that's not going to happen.

I listened to the Premier answering questions in the House today, and he was very confrontational. I believe there is a lot of goodwill still out there among those who want to work with members of the Legislative Assembly, with parents, with students and with others interested in education to help our education system, to build our education system, and this bill certainly does not help with that.

We're going to see a further erosion of junior kindergarten, which is so important, as all the academic studies are today proving; or the needs of special children, who are now in the regular classroom; or adult education, where people are going back to be re-educated and retrained for the new job opportunities we hope will be out there.

All of this withdrawal of funds is to pay for an income tax cut which will benefit the wealthiest people in our society to the greatest extent and will remove services. It was ill conceived until such time as you have your budget balanced. That is what is driving this agenda for further and further cuts.

There is a denigrating of trustees, there is a denigrating of members of the teaching profession. I listened to some of the inflammatory speeches I have heard that are attacking teachers, trying to do it by attacking the teachers' federation representatives, duly elected by teachers in this province. I don't think that is going to be healthy.

There is an attack, as my friend from Renfrew North indicated, on the publicly funded education system in this province. The publicly funded education system is that instrument we use to provide equality of opportunity. We can't guarantee equality of outcome, but the publicly funded system, when it's at its healthiest, when it has a sufficient investment in it, is a good system which allows people to have that kind of equality which wouldn't be there otherwise. I see that eroding.

I have mentioned as well that the government appears to be hiding behind the recommendations of the commission, co-chaired by David Cooke, the former NDP member and Minister of Education, and Ann Vanstone, when in fact what it is doing is selectively cherry-picking, if you will, those recommendations which it feels are going to suit its agenda.

I must mention — and it looks like I have to end on this. Perhaps this story best tells what is happening in education. I recall when Dianne Cunningham, the member for London North, was the education critic for the Progressive Conservative Party. She spoke one night in St Catharines to a meeting of the Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation in Lincoln county. In fact, I introduced her on that evening as one of the guests, and I introduced her in some pretty glowing terms. She provided a very moderate message. It wasn't something I would agree with in its entirety, but it was moderate, it was pro-education, it was trying to build the consensus with the members of the teaching profession who were there.

On the very same day, Mike Harris was speaking in St Catharines at the lunch-hour, and it was a far different message. He was speaking to the Rotary Club in this particular case. That's irrelevant, but it was not, obviously, the members of the teaching profession, although there were some educators there. The message was one of confrontation. It was an attempt to play on the resentment that some people have of members of the teaching profession, particularly those who haven't had to be in the classroom on a daily basis, who don't have to confront Ontario as it is in 1997 and the many, many challenges that teachers face.

I thought that was instructive of what is happening in this government. The formerly moderate Conservative government represented by Dianne Cunningham, and I would suggest Elizabeth Witmer, at least in the field of education directly, though I disagree vehemently with her Bill 136, when she was chair of the board of education in Waterloo, I'm sure had a far different approach to education, much more of a consensus-building approach. What we see today is shoving the teachers aside, is attacking them.

If we are to be successful, we must enlist the support and active involvement of the teachers of the province of

Ontario. They want to work on behalf of students. They want to work with parents. They want to work with the community. You will not do that if you allow this bill to pass this assembly in its present state.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

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Mr Marchese: I congratulate the member for St Catharines and agree with much of what he has said. I have listened closely to the members for Durham-York and Scarborough Centre and Northumberland and I have to tell you these are fine soldiers, always on duty for the revolution, dedicated to mythologizing as best they can this Bill 160; revolutionaries looking for an enemy, and they've found it in the teachers, except they call them the unions. Needless to say, they call themselves federations, but these guys here, they call them unions.

Have you heard from Mike Harris, the members for Northumberland and Scarborough Centre? The reference is always unions. Not teachers, although from time to time they get careless and they attack the teaching profession as well, where they say, "They can't be trusted." But the focus, by and large — you might have observed this; I have because I listened closely to them — they talk about bureaucracies, they talk about unions, they talk about simplifying finances, they talk about accountability, all buzz words that Reformers like to listen to.

I listened closely to the member for Scarborough Centre, who said, "They're not like us, who think that we can improve the system by spending more money." Then the member for Durham-York, who I've gotten to know in some of the committee work, says the school system isn't getting enough dollars and that somehow we have to put more money into the system. I don't get it. One guy says, "These guys are saying that they can improve the education system by spending more." That's what the member for Durham-Centre said, and Julia, from Durham-York, says, "We're trying to put more money." What is it? What are you trying to do? We don't understand what you're trying to do. These teachers here, they don't understand either. I've got a problem, they've got a problem, and our educational system has a problem.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke-Rexdale): I guess I would start with some of the myths we've heard tonight from members opposite. Some of the myths are: One, if you only put another $6 trillion or $8 trillion into the system, there would be no problem.

Interjections.

Mr Hastings: That's what you want, spend the whole provincial budget on education.

Two, the PTR is directly attributable to bad learning. If you had a one-on-one ratio you'd have a great ideal education system. How come it is then that certain teacher organizations increase their PTR? In one instance, Fort Frances, by 25 to 28 in JK.

Three, school boards spend responsibly. Preparation time tremendously prudently used every day. Types of inputs: If you'd only put more money into the system; don't ask for results. That's bad. Student achievement tremendous in this province; there's no problem there. There's no problem in terms of trying to retain the status quo. If you retain the status quo, you're not attacking teachers. As soon as you propose a change, that's attack on education, attack on change. Some of the more irresponsible myths we've heard tonight.

I'm sure we're going to continue to hear them because, if you continue to repeat them, they must be true, particularly if you take something like "Student achievement is great at the present time." We've heard that from over there now because the members opposite have been quoting recently that you can't use international testing and where students were in a particular study of math or language development.

All we've heard from across the way are myths. Too bad they wouldn't face some realities for a change.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have some myths. I want to talk about the marketplace, because perhaps that is the language of those over on the other side. I have a copy here of an article from the Toronto Star business section on Saturday. It has a nice picture of Tuna Tsubouchi on a tanning bed.

"Public Cuts are Private Gains," is the headline. In the body of the article it says —

Mr Jim Flaherty (Durham Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe the practice in this place, well established, is to refer to members by their ridings and not by other appellations. The member well knows that.

The Acting Speaker: It is a point of order. Refer to them by their riding.

Mr Michael Brown: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would just like to quote from the article. The article says:

"The Common Sense Revolution has meant big bucks for Michael Peever, president of A Little Extra Help Tutoring Services of Whitby.

"'The best thing to happen to my business is what the government has been doing lately cutting back education funding and increasing class sizes.'

"He's got a booth set up at the CFA trade show to sell tutoring franchises.

"For $15,000, which includes a computer, you too can start up a tutoring business — and you don't even have to have teaching experience.

"Peever said franchises typically make about $28,000 in their first year and earnings should go up in time.

"His main contribution is access to a data base that contains lists of retired, unemployed or underemployed teachers...

"'Ontario is so ripe for this business,' he said. 'The phone has been ringing off the hook.'"

That's the marketplace. The marketplace is saying you're cutting education, you're hurting kids, and what it means is the death of public education in this province. For those who can afford it, they can call Michael Peever, they can get tutoring for their kids. For those who can't, "Too bad," says Mike Harris.

M. Pouliot : Comme il l'a si bien souligné, mon collègue et ami de St Catharines, si ce soir ici à l'Assemblée le gouvernement aurait choisi l'appel au

calme, l'appel à la discussion plutôt que d'un cri de guerre — parce que, voyez-vous, en fin de compte c'est qu'on parle ici d'argent. On parle ici de 5 $ milliards en consultation totale avec les mieux nantis de notre société, et les dépourvus, les esseulés, les pauvres, ceux qui en ont moins doivent payer à la caisse de ce gouvernement les 5 $ milliards.

We are not here, or we shouldn't be, to talk about vouchers, to provoke with alternatives emanating from the Premier's office, from the whiz kids, where you will have "school for profit." This is about $5 billion. They're on the hook. Who is going to pay? The people on Bay Street will not pay, for the $5 billion is destined to reach their pockets.

First it was people on welfare, social assistance, the less fortunate, the marginalized: 21.6% cut. Then Mikey and the gang found that it was not enough. They became insatiable and they said, "Let's move up the food chain." They've jeopardized the very essence of our system, that of education, that of our future — no less than that.

They know no bounds. They must reconcile the books. If the human dimension, if the essence of life stands in the way, they get together and a mere click of the heels will dispense of what should be done in order that the mantra, that their agenda, that the commissars, that the brigade have their way and balance those bloody books.

The Acting Speaker: If I could have a minute. I just wanted to caution the members about inflammatory statements. I think that we should choose our words well, we should say what we mean, but I would caution you that there are some terms that are inflammatory and I would ask you to desist.

Mr Pouliot: Mr Speaker, should I use "economic cleansing"? Is that okay?

The Acting Speaker: If I have to be more specific, don't use "clicking heels" again in my presence, please.

The Chair recognizes the member for St Catharines for his response.

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Mr Bradley: I appreciate the comments of the various members. I agree with some and don't with others. I simply want to indicate to those who have spoken that they have to recognize the situation that exists in the classrooms today and how it is substantially different from what it was a number of years ago.

If you think, for instance, of Metropolitan Toronto, teachers on almost a daily basis are confronted with people of a variety of cultures, dozens of different cultures and languages, kids coming into the classroom in those circumstances. There are far more dysfunctional families in our society today, whether we want to accept that or not. So the challenges are far different than they were many years ago, and my fear is that this government is stuck somewhere in the 1950s in its approach to education, which may well have served us well at that time, but in the present circumstance will not serve us well.

You'll notice that the government members have been told to use the words "status quo," that anyone who disagrees with what the government is doing is in favour of the status quo. These are the words given to the government members by the Premier's staff. They are told to use those particular words. We can spot them in virtually all the speeches we hear.

What's unfortunate is that this government is going about denigrating the system of education. Though I would not be unkind enough to name people, I suspect there are members on the government benches who are, at the very least, uncomfortable with this attack on the education system and the people in the education system. I hope the government will step back from its rhetoric, that it will abandon its $1-million advertising campaign to promote its partisan agenda, that it will try to work with teachers instead of against teachers in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Marchese: The question for the people watching this debate tonight is this: Do these revolutionaries want to control education to improve it or do they want to raid the educational system to pay for their income tax cut? That's really the question. Let's look at some of the things that I believe speak to the issue of what it is they're trying to do. I argue that they're trying to raid it.

Look at what they've done with junior kindergarten. You'll recall that debate, Speaker, when most of us argued that it was foolhardy for this government to eliminate junior kindergarten. I know that M. Harris says, "We didn't do it." But you control the funding. If you don't give the funding so that junior kindergarten can be provided, school boards cannot provide it. Those who have a few dollars can, but the majority of school boards are not doing it. They can't afford it. When you continue to raid it as you have done, it will disappear.

Why would they do that? We know, all of us — I know some of these Tories know, and many people watching — that junior kindergarten is an important equalizer of educational opportunity. We say this because most of us know that we are not all equal, that students do not come to the classroom as equals. Our conditions are different. Some kids come from poor homes where the literacy levels are very low, due to no fault of their own, I would argue; some come with the great fortune of heredity and other benefits, come with money, a whole lot of it; some people, with good luck or otherwise, have some good educational background, so they have high literacy skills in their professions, and the people with money and with literacy skills are able to pass on some of that rich capital and heritage to their children, and they do better. Those who are not so lucky come to the educational system unequal. They're not as well prepared. Thus, there is a disparity in the classroom when you get those children.

The function of junior kindergarten was to try to bring all children to the same level. Even though you cannot ever do that, the attempt would be to try. We know that in other systems where they have done this, educational outcomes for all children improve if you offer early childhood education for those students who don't have that same rich capital to bring to the classroom.

If these revolutionaries were so keen on improving educational quality for children, why would they cancel the

junior kindergarten program? Isn't that a good question, mon ami Gilles Pouliot?

Then there is adult education. They cut the funding for adult education. Most of the people who go back to school are those who have had, in some cases, low literacy levels; many people want to upgrade their educational skills. If these fine revolutionaries were interested in improving educational outcomes for children, why would they cut the possibilities for adults to have a better opportunity to learn? If you cut the funding, some of those people are not going to be so lucky to get those programs, so why would you do that? Remember, if these people do well and acquire greater literacy skills, they pass on those skills to their children, thus improving educational outcome. So why do these revolutionaries cut that funding, including cutting funding for ESL? I think it should puzzle most observers.

Why would you take $1 billion out of the elementary-secondary school system and university system? You've done that already. You can't deny that. It's done. Surely taking money out is not going to improve the educational system, I don't think. In fact, Liz Sandals, executive vice-president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, says you can't have an increase in quality and a bankrupting of the system at the same time. She's right. If you take money out and bankrupt it, you cannot improve the educational system. It's an oxymoron. It's contradictory. It can't happen. But that's what these folks talk about. They say we can do better with less. I don't see it. Liz Sandals doesn't see it. I know teachers don't see it either, and I believe parents don't see it.

You can do your best, Mike Harris and the others, to mythologize, using those words you believe people are going to like: "unions," because you think people hate unions. That's why you don't say "federations." You say "unions," you say "union leaders."

Mr Wildman: Union bosses.

Mr Marchese: Or "union bosses." That's even better, right? It's a negative thing. That's why you use it. I know that. They know it too.

That's why you talk about "bureaucracy," because the Reform-minded people you represent love that: "Oh, yes, getting rid of bureaucracy. That's good." You don't explain, really, how that works. You don't explain that by eliminating some trustees, a few trustees, even 100 trustees, you save a pittance, that if you amalgamate and fire a few people, maybe a few superintendents, you save a pittance. That money doesn't go back into the system really. It's not a whole lot of money that you're cutting, but it sounds good to your Reform-minded friends.

I have to tell you, those of you who are thinking — and I'm disappointed in my friend from Durham-York, because she was —

The Acting Speaker: Please direct your remarks to the Chair.

Mr Marchese: Always through you, Speaker. I'm disappointed, because the member for Durham-York was a teacher for 25 years, and I see her here again as a fine soldier, just repeating the same lines. I felt she was uncomfortable having to do what she did. I really believe, Julia, that you were uncomfortable talking about what you said. I'm not sure you believe in some of this stuff. As a teacher, I believe she would know what a lot of these teachers here understand.

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Mrs Munro: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think the member for Fort York has imputed motive and integrity in the comments he's made.

The Acting Speaker: I did not hear the member impute any motive.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Speaker, for your assistance and your quick ability to deal with that.

I want to get to some of the points in Bill 160. These people talk about setting standards for class sizes. You cannot reduce class size. It takes billions of dollars. You've taken billions of dollars out. You can't reduce it. Even if you keep class sizes where they are, they're extremely high. But you can't play the game that you can reduce it. It takes billions of dollars, and you're taking it out. You've eviscerated the system, so you can't do it. That's point number one.

Increase the number of instructional days, those contact days: That's not going to help you very much. Those of you on the other side who are teachers should know better. You increase instructional days by one week. You think, Jack Carroll, your children would have learned a hell of a lot more in one week? Please.

Mr Flaherty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member knows full well what the rules are, but he insists on referring to members by their names rather than by their ridings. He brings this problem on himself.

The Acting Speaker: It is a point of order, and I would ask you to refer to the members by their ridings.

Mr Marchese: The use of non-teaching professionals: How does that help the teaching system? They say, "For a gym teacher you don't need educational qualifications." How does that improve the educational quality of the classroom? Librarians: You can hire somebody else who's got a couple of years of experience. How does hiring some of these other people improve the educational system? That's what this bill speaks to.

It talks about removing the taxing powers of local school boards so they can equalize taxes. What these people are going to do is equalize poverty for every school board across the province. They're not going to increase the funding; they're going to decrease it. It's a harmonization of a bottomless pit to the sewers, to a two-tier educational system, one public and one private. That's what they're leading us to. That's what this thing is all about.

Notice they never speak to Bill 160. It's all rambling about other things because they have nothing to tell you about Bill 160. I'm looking forward to the remarks of some of the people over there to Bill 160 and some of the remarks I have made.

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker: Clear the galleries. I'll assume the rest of us would like to stay.

Comments and questions?

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the comments of the member for Fort York, particularly with respect to junior kindergarten and blaming the fact that some school boards chose not to offer that program in the last school year on our government.

In my own region of Durham, the school boards exercised their discretion. For example, the separate school board maintained junior kindergarten and the public school board chose not to. But those were decisions made, allocating resources, at the local level.

Education is open to quality improvement. It seems like a pretty obvious point, but I gather it's a point that is not shared by many of the members opposite. I encourage all watching this to educate themselves as much as possible about the important issues raised by Bill 160, dealing with differentiated staffing, dealing with class size, dealing with the amount of instruction, the amount of classroom time that teachers spend in classrooms each day in Ontario. These are all very important issues.

I'm sure the members opposite would also want to educate themselves about those issues, which are reviewed in a very helpful publication, the first report of the Education Improvement Commission. It's not too long a report. I'm sure the members opposite would be happy to provide it to those constituents of theirs who call them. Certainly we are, because this report —

Mr Marchese: You're the best.

Mr Flaherty: The member for Fort York will want to know this and he'll want to read the report, because it deals with those very important issues of class size —

Mr Marchese: I know you've read it.

Mr Flaherty: Yes, I have read it. I've read it very carefully. Rational debate requires knowing what the issues are, knowing what the arguments are on each side, and that's the kind of debate the people of the province expect to see in this legislative chamber.

Also we need to set an example, and those who were in the gallery have just set what I consider to be a rather poor example for the students of the province by disrupting the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly.

I encourage rational debate; I encourage everyone to read this and engage in that sort of helpful, rational debate.

Mr Bradley: One of the things that most people in the province will be looking forward to is very extensive hearings across the province so that people can make their views known. The member who just addressed the House indicated that there should be rational debate. One of those opportunities is when you provide a chance right across the province, in various centres, for people to come to meet with members of the committee and make representations to them.

I hope the government is not going to severely restrict the amount of time that might be available for those kinds of public hearings and restrict the various venues for them. Even if people see at the end that not all their wishes have been accommodated, you will find that people at least appreciate the opportunity to make presentations to a committee of the Ontario Legislature, to make their views known, to have their day in court, if you will.

As the House leader of the Liberal Party, I have made the case and will make the case again tomorrow at the House leaders' meeting for very extensive hearings not just here in Toronto but across the province.

Some members of this House who are not from Toronto recognize the importance of having people in their community, some who may agree with the provisions of this bill and some who disagree with the provisions of the bill, to make known their views to the committee. This is a very radical bill, in my view. It is a bill which makes substantial change, which I don't think there's a consensus supporting at this point in time in the province. It may well be that after hearing from people who come to committee, the government will make the kind of changes to the bill, or decide to withdraw the bill, which would have a consensus backing in this province.

I hope it isn't just another case, as it was with Bill 136, of ramming it through as quickly as possible with as little input as possible.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I want to congratulate the member for Fort York for his inspiring statements with respect to Bill 160. I'm not sure there was anything in his remarks that caused the outbreak that happened in the galleries. There was certainly nothing that he said that would provoke that kind of response. I think what we're seeing is a response by teachers who are frustrated by a government that is refusing to listen to their concerns. They have no way of getting this government to listen to them, and they are just speaking out in any way they have at their disposal.

This is a government that doesn't want to have public hearings with respect to this bill. They don't want to hear people's opposition to it. People who are frustrated with this government's dictatorial approach find no other ways to express themselves than what we saw here tonight.

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I want to thank the member for Fort York for his comments about junior kindergarten as well. As a parent of a son who is in senior kindergarten right now I understand the importance of having an effective senior kindergarten and junior kindergarten program in our public school. It's very important, I know, for my son to ensure he has that opportunity to be able to attend senior kindergarten so that he's well prepared for his future years in education.

I also want to acknowledge the remarks he made with respect to the savings that are going to be found by reducing trustees and reducing bureaucracy. He said these savings are going to be a mere pittance when you compare that to the $1 billion this government wants to take out of the education system. We've seen in the Essex county and Windsor area that, as a result of the amalgamation of the boards, the administration isn't going to be reduced. They're planning to keep the same level of administration. They're not finding the savings that this government is purporting they're going to.

Mr Smith: It's a pleasure to comment on the remarks made by the member for Fort York, although I must say,

I'm more inclined to reflect on the comments from my colleague from Durham Centre, because I think he provided some very good advice to all members of the Legislature in terms of the issues to which we should be turning our attention with respect to this matter.

The member for Windsor-Riverside says we have not been listening. That simply isn't the case, as I've met with teachers across this province, as the minister has met with teachers. It was made very clear to us on many occasions that they need not have their right to strike removed, that we need not pull vice-principals and principals out of the system, that we need not eliminate their ability to affiliate with whatever federation of choice. We heard that; we responded to that. The minister has clearly indicated that's not a priority in terms of our government objective to bring a quality education system to this province.

To say we're not listening to teachers in this province is simply not acceptable, because it is happening. The minister, on a number of occasions, has invited the input of teachers from all federations to provide us with advice with respect to collective bargaining issues. We seek teacher input on many issues with respect to the technical input we're looking for in terms of the fair funding model, curriculum, all of which has been developed by teacher writing teams across this province. To suggest teachers have not been involved in the reform agenda is not accurate. We continue to invite their participation in what is a very aggressive reform agenda for education in this province.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Fort York has two minutes to respond.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate the comments made by the four members. But I have to comment on the comments by the members for Durham Centre and Middlesex in particular.

The member for Durham Centre talks about how these teachers were so impolite and set such a bad example. It offends me. These people, your friends, are eviscerating the educational system and he expects them to be polite. Can you figure that out? Maybe he wants us to clothe ourselves in antiseptic every time we speak; I don't know. It can't be done when these people are assaulting the educational system the way they are.

He talks about junior kindergarten and fails to understand — I believe, because I'm not sure what he understands — that unless the provincial government provides funding, most boards cannot afford to provide junior kindergarten. But this man speaks of choice: boards have a choice to do or not to do. If he understood the value of junior kindergarten, he'd stand up and say, "The provincial governments have a role in funding it," but he doesn't understand, and he talks about our being irrational. I defy this guy on anything I said that might not have been rational; I defy him to quote anything I said that may not have been rational, any part of my 10-minute speech.

To the member for Middlesex who says they are listening, these teachers are ready to strike. The member for Middlesex says they're talking to them. They're ready to strike; they're shut out. He says they are talking to them and involving them — including the other member for Durham Centre. These people are ready to strike. They're sending you a message that unless they are involved in the educational process, no change can be fruitful. That's what they're telling you.

The Acting Speaker: I just want to remind the Sergeant at Arms that I wanted the galleries kept clear for the rest of the evening. I wanted those who were ejected escorted out of the building.

Further debate? The member for Kitchener.

Mr Gary L. Leadston (Kitchener-Wilmot): Kitchener-Wilmot.

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, Kitchener-Wilmot.

Mr Leadston: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It's rather nice to hear that rather than "some guy" as referred to by members of the opposition.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to participate in this evening's debate on Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act. I would like to focus my comments on what I believe — and so many of my constituents have told me — is the real issue underlying Bill 160 and other reforms in the area of education and training.

That issue is, as the bill so explicitly states, education quality. Everyone agrees that our education system needs to be reformed. Everyone agrees that improvements need to be made to ensure our students obtain the best possible education and the best possible academic and practical preparation that will afford them a sound and secure future.

As I listen to the comments made by the opposition on this proposed legislation, I do not hear from them about improving education quality. We don't hear anything from them about how they would make sure our students are ready to take their place in tomorrow's internationally competitive workforce. We don't hear anything from them by way of constructive recommendations or suggestions on how best to strengthen the focus of our educational system on the client it is designed to serve: the student. Instead what we get from the opposition is simply resistance to needed change.

The opposition likes to get up in the House and criticize the government for not listening to the public. Has the opposition even bothered to listen to the parents with respect to what they think about how well our education system is doing? Have they gone beyond the special interests they are really depending on that have nothing whatsoever to do with the education of our children? The opposition's educational equation is yesterday's formula for mediocrity and failure.

Both parties had their kick at the can, so to speak, when they were in government. Neither of them had the political will to act on what the public, especially parents, told them needed to be done within our educational system. Instead they chose to bury their heads in the sand and do nothing, despite the fact that our students were falling more and more behind students in other jurisdictions in terms of educational achievement.

The opposition thinks Bill 160 is about money. I, for one, understand why they would focus on money. When

they were in power, they certainly threw enough of it at their problems that they faced while in government, without solving anything.

Bill 160 is about changing the system. It is about improved quality of education. It is about making our children, the students, the focus of our education system once more. For example, at present, school boards and unions can make agreements to increase class size. Many parents are concerned that large class sizes affect their children's ability to learn. This is entirely a logical conclusion that can be drawn. Right now class sizes are larger than the number of teachers would indicate. In the elementary system there is one teacher for every 17 students, but average class size is 25; in the secondary grades there is one teacher for every 15 students, but average class size is 22.

Bill 160 would for the first time prevent school boards from increasing class size. It is as simple as that. I would suggest to the opposition that when they discuss Bill 160, they should state their specific position on issues such as class size. Parents don't like class sizes. We in government agree with the parents. Why doesn't the opposition? What Bill 160 is proposing to do isn't difficult to understand; it isn't complicated. The opposition obviously is trying to make it much more complicated.

The Education Improvement Commission, for example, believes there is a relationship between the time teachers spend with students in the classroom and increased student achievement; in other words, the more time teachers spend with students, the better students perform. That's not a difficult concept to comprehend.

High school teachers in Ontario currently spend as much as 20% less time with their students than teachers in other jurisdictions. High school teachers in Ontario on average spend 3.75 hours of their working day teaching students, compared to the national average of 4.5 hours a day. On average, students spend five hours a day in the classroom. Bill 160 would allow the province to set standards for the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom. Instructional time is clearly an issue of educational standards; again not a difficult concept.

At the university level, students are often encouraged to see their teachers and professors as frequently as they need in order to discuss their individual questions. I would like to see that kind of relationship between students and teachers take hold and develop at the pre-university level as well. I am encouraged that Bill 160 will pave the way for that to happen.

Another important issue affecting the quality of education is the amount of —

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to interrupt you some time and I was wondering if this would be a good opportunity.

Mr Leadston: I appreciate the time, Mr Speaker, if it would allow me the opportunity to continue and conclude my remarks at a future time. Should I adjourn the debate?

The Acting Speaker: No, you will continue the next time this bill comes up for discussion.

Mr Leadston: Rather than adjourn the debate, Mr Speaker — I'm not sure of the appropriate wording — I'd like the opportunity to continue my remarks at the earliest possible convenience of the House. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: It being 9:30, this House stands adjourned until 10 am tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2132.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 2 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 2 octobre 1997

The House met at 1000.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

BALANCED BUDGET

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): I move that in the opinion of this House, since past provincial governments have been known to spend well beyond their means and these overspending practices have placed the people and the province of Ontario in a precarious fiscal position, and

Since responsible governments should be able to spend within the means available to them and the present government under the leadership of the Honourable Mike Harris intends to balance the budget by the year 2000-01,

Therefore, after balancing the provincial budget, the government of Ontario should recognize the importance of ensuring that future governments do not place the province of Ontario in fiscal difficulty and should introduce balanced budget legislation that will prohibit deficits in future provincial budgets, require the government to dissolve within 90 days of the presentation of an unbalanced budget or the overspending of a budget, and require the people of Ontario to approve government borrowing through a province-wide referendum that includes a repayment schedule for the principal and the interest.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Pursuant to standing order 96(c)(i), the honourable member has 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr Bert Johnson: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to present and speak to this resolution. I look forward to the comments of all my colleagues in the House this morning, as we will be debating what I consider should be the future direction of provincial governments.

I'd like to begin by briefly discussing the reason I've brought this resolution forward and how I see it impacting the future of Ontario if it receives the support of the members today.

In 1994 I looked around my riding of Perth county and was not at all happy with what I saw. The people I had grown up with, the people I lived and worked with were being subjected to an ever-increasing burden. Taxes were high, unemployment was high and government spending was high. About the only thing that was low was morale. The people of Perth county were living within their means while being forced to support a government that could not do the same.

I had a decision to make. I could sit back and watch this happen or I could join with others and try to make a difference. I decided to make that difference, so October 5, 1994, I delivered a speech in which I promised the people of Perth county that a brighter future was possible. I would like to read an excerpt from that speech I gave on my nomination night as it lays the foundation for this resolution I have tabled in the Legislature which we are debating today.

"Year after year, somewhere in the budget speech — look for it along with the finance minister's new shoes — the provincial, or the federal as well, Treasurer says, 'We will pay down the deficit.' Does he mean it? Yes. Will he do it? Not unless he has a lucky trip to the casino in Windsor. He will not do it and the reason he won't do it is because it's not in his budget figures, just in his speech.

"If you're surprised and think this oversight is the fault of our forefathers' design of the provincial budget, I don't agree. I think their common sense told them that if you borrowed something, you paid it back — not leave it for your children to pay back. So it wasn't in our budget way back when and it's not in our budget now.

"Could it be that it's a bad idea? I don't think so. Your banker insists that capital repayment is in your budget and the province of Ontario insists that capital repayment be in the budget of every municipality and school board."

That was written in 1994 when the provincial government had presented the people of Ontario with high deficits and massive accumulated debt. In fact, the higher the NDP government hiked taxes in 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994, the less revenue the province took in. The policies, which resulted in 65 tax increases in 10 years, were crushing the spirit of the hardworking people of Ontario.

That's why I was proud to become part of the Mike Harris team that was looking towards the future of Ontario. The vision is summed up in one sentence: "It's time for government to make the same types of changes all of us have had to make our own families and in our jobs." For those of you who missed that one, it can be found in the introduction to the Common Sense Revolution.

In June 1995 the people of Ontario sent a clear message that the time for government overspending had to end. They gave the job of straightening out the province's finances to the Mike Harris team, and I'm proud to say that we are succeeding.

As the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Ernie Eves, announced recently, we are on or ahead of schedule to balance the budget and we are witnessing the return of jobs, hope, growth and opportunity to the province of

Ontario. As of the first quarter, the deficit for 1997-98 is projected at $6.6 billion — still way too high, but more than 40% below the $11.3-billion deficit the government was faced with when it took office.

In 1995 we set out workable targets and as a government we have modestly overachieved on our targets in the first two years of our mandate. Our plan was to cut taxes, cut spending, remove barriers to growth, do better with less and to fully balance Ontario's budget. Clearly we are doing what we set out to accomplish and we will have the budget balanced.

With this goal accomplished, we must begin to once again look to the future and ensure that the people of Ontario are not put in a position of fiscal difficulty again. It is for this reason that I've introduced the resolution we are debating today. I see the need for legislation that will ensure that governments of the future are as responsible and accountable to the people of Ontario as the present government under the leadership of Mike Harris.

Balanced budget legislation is not new. Quebec introduced legislation in 1996 mandating a balanced budget by the year 1999-2000. Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick introduced legislation in 1995.

The legislation which other districts have introduced covers a wide range of ideologies. My resolution focuses on three main points: (1) there should be no deficit in a provincial budget; (2) overspending should result in an immediate election; and (3) government borrowing must include a repayment schedule for the principal and interest and must be approved by a referendum.

The first point I have already discussed. There is a need for governments to live within their means, just as the people of Perth county, whom I represent, live within their budgetary means.

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The second point revolves around the policies of the Mike Harris government. In 1995 we set out to (1) build a climate where jobs and prosperity are equally available to all, (2) to maintain the quality of life, unrivalled in North America, that we in Ontario enjoy, and (3) to ensure a healthy future for our children, full of hope, opportunity and security.

We are accomplishing these goals. Governments in the past have failed to do this, and if governments of the future can't do it, I feel that they should be required to go to the polls and test their excuses on the voters.

The third point I have addressed in the resolution is the use of referendums to determine spending priorities. The Common Sense Revolution was the consolidation of years of listening to the people of Ontario. The policies outlined were those of the people of Ontario.

For many politicians, especially the government of the time, listening to the people of Ontario was a new concept. As I mentioned earlier, governments in the past have always stated their commitment to the principle of a balanced budget, but it was only this government that had a sound fiscal plan and the will to carry it out.

In 1997-98, $9.2 billion has been budgeted to cover the public debt interest alone. Imagine what could be done for the people of this province if this money were available now. The use of referendums in the future will allow the people of Ontario to set the standards and keep the government accountable to the electorate.

It is my hope that the decision today will start the debate over the need for balanced budget legislation in Ontario. As a whole, this resolution will tell Ontarians that the provincial government will never again mortgage our children's tomorrow through unaffordable spending.

I thank you for your time, and I look forward to receiving support for this endeavour from the members of this Legislature, as I have received much support from the people of the great riding of Perth.

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): I'm pleased to rise on this important issue of the motion that's being presented before this assembly today. It is a motion. It does not bind this House. It is an expression of opinion of this House, but it's dealing with an important matter, not only for government finances, but it affects the economic wellbeing of this province.

I bring some particular personal opinion to this. As a professional economist, I can tell you that if you get two economists, you get three opinions, and there are many opinions about the nature of the issue that the honourable member for Perth has presented to us.

I have to applaud the honourable member for Perth. I know, as a former municipal politician, that he and I share the same background of balanced budgets. In the municipal sector, both for school boards and for municipalities, we are required to bring in a balanced budget every year. But the honourable member has maybe failed to remember or recognize that that is for the operating budget only. On the capital side, municipalities borrow all the time. It is sometimes impossible to finance a major capital work from the local property tax base, so you borrow money, rent money, over the next so many years, and indeed municipalities and school boards have accumulated debt, within certain limits set down by the Ontario Municipal Board. In this context, the honourable member for Perth and his community I'm sure have availed themselves of the same thing.

This brings me back to the issue of the day, which is the motion before us here that once the government attains a balanced budget it is required thereafter always to have an annual balanced budget. Quite frankly, if this were a municipality, this would be easy to say, because property tax by and large funds very stable services. It is not really susceptible to the winds of economic change, to the pressures that are put on to us by a recession because of our major trading partner to the south or whatever.

This is the major difference, because municipalities and school boards have stable funding and stable expenses, except for that one part, which we've heard from municipalities a thousand and one times, where they are obliged to contribute to income redistribution programs. Property tax, as we all know, is not appropriate for that. As a matter of fact, the chair of the Who Does What commission, David Crombie, said that financing income redistribution programs from property tax is not only

wrong in theory but devastating in practice. I just have to take you back to the Dirty Thirties, where municipalities went bankrupt trying to do that.

This leads me back to the issue at hand. Our party did present a balanced budget proposal during the last election, but it was over a specific cycle, the term of the government, five years, similar to what is there in New Brunswick. This makes sense, because part of the responsibilities of the provincial government is to try and maintain some kind of stability within our provincial economy, as best as possible, and try to protect our vulnerable. If you look at the beginning of the recession at the turn of this decade, 1990-91, where we had our last balanced budget, under a Liberal administration — look back over the past 25 years and you'll see there was only one balanced budget, which was under a Liberal administration; you'll see 17 years' worth of unbalanced budgets by previous Conservative administrations. But I'll leave that to one side.

What happened the following year? The following year we walk into a recession. Our revenues go down by over $1 billion and our requirements to support the vulnerable in our community go up by over $1 billion. Right away, under this proposed resolution, we would be forced into an election, we'd be forced to lay off people, we'd be forced to cut benefits. We would hurt the economy by being pro-cyclical, meaning we'd be taking money out. I would like to remind my colleagues opposite that in their hunt to chase down expenditures, when they cut welfare rates by 21.4%, they took, believe it or not, $150 million out of the economy of Ottawa-Carleton, so the recession that was already in place worsened.

All I can tell my colleagues opposite is that while it's fine to trumpet the mantra of a balanced budget, you have to look at a reasonable time line and look at the responsibilities of government to do that.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): It's with some trepidation that I rise to participate in this debate, knowing that I may very well be the victim of slings and arrows from across the way. However, I'm prepared for that.

The member for Ottawa West made a comment about being a professional economist. Before I get into this debate I just wanted to share some of my thoughts about professional economists. I think they have a role to play in this debate as well. I can tell you that in another life I used to take the advice of professional economists, much to my own peril.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton North): How did you recover?

Mr Laughren: Not very well. I have yet to see an accurate forecast from one of them. But there are two sayings about economists. One is that if you laid all the economists in the world end to end, they wouldn't reach a conclusion. The other one, I think a more appropriate line, is that if you laid all the economists in the world end to end, it would indeed be a very good thing. I think that's the better line on professional economists — not to do damage to the member for Ottawa West, of course.

I must say, this debate around balanced budgets is one that I find very interesting. The new right got caught up in the whole argument of balanced budgets, and I understand that. It certainly sounds appealing, and at first blush it is very appealing. Quite frankly, if you've got a government at this level, it's not that difficult to accomplish either.

We're seeing how this government is going to balance its budget. It's not hard: Take $1 billion out of education, download on the municipalities, raise tuition fees even higher. It's not that hard to do. All you have to do is download. You learned well from the federal Liberals in Ottawa. They did a masterful job of downloading on the province. So the province says, "There's a good idea. Why don't we download on our partners, the municipalities and the school boards?" and anybody else they can get their hands on, like the seniors of this province or like the Red Cross. There are different ways you can balance your budget. I mean, I could stop supporting my children. Of course I should be anyway; they're old enough. But anyway, that's for another day.

1020

Mr Derwyn Shea (High Park-Swansea): They're all in their 50s.

Mr Laughren: Listen, I may have trouble supporting myself since the Premier took away my gold-plated pension plan.

Interjections.

Mr Laughren: I don't know what all the heckling's about. One of the things the Premier ran for election on was that he was going to cancel the MPPs' gold-plated pension plan, and he did, and do I ever resent it. However, I'll put that aside, because I'm not here to argue for something for my own self-interest.

I simply say that I wouldn't get too enthusiastic about the member's resolution, although I can understand where he is coming from and I give him credit for bringing it forward for debate here this morning. I think it's a well-worded resolution. I'm just issuing a word of caution about what can be involved if a government is determined that it absolutely must balance its budget at the provincial level and if there is a downturn in the economy. All that means is that you have to speed up your downloading and your cuts to people who depend upon support from the province, whether that's the school board or whether that's the municipalities.

We know that's happening. I can take you to a community in my own constituency where the government, in its interest to provide a tax cut for those people who don't need it nearly as much as the people who live in this small community need a break, I can tell you — the downloading on that municipality, the net downloading, is 175% of their tax base. Now, you tell me how that community is going to deal with that. I can tell you.

Mr Bob Wood (London South): Transition funds.

Mr Laughren: They've already been told the maximum they can get out of the transition fund, and it still leaves them over 100% of their tax base. I know the solution and I'm advising them to do that: Send the keys to Al Leach or to Chris Hodgson. Send the keys. That's what

I would do, and I'm advising them to do that. If that's what the government wants, if that's the way you balance your budget, that's the kind of fallout you're going to have to deal with. Why wouldn't you? Why would anybody have to cope with that in a small municipality where the tax rate is already high because it's a small community and they don't have the substantial tax base and residential taxpayers are already paying a great deal?

I say to the member for Perth that while I appreciate the fact he's brought this resolution forward, I'm going to have difficulty supporting it, partly because I think people would see it as somewhat contradictory on my part if I did support it; and second, I worry about how you get there and how you stay there at that balanced budget at this level of government, where you have to consider, as the member for Ottawa West said, the cycles of economic activity in the country.

We're on an upswing now and I'm happy about that, but I can tell you it won't always be on the upswing. There will be downturns in the economy. We know it's going to happen. When it does, you're going to find it a lot more difficult and a lot more difficult to cope with balancing a budget if suddenly your revenues are going through the floor. Believe me, it can happen. Then what do you do? You can't overnight download.

This government has some time now to download because the economy is growing. But if the economy were shrinking and you were doing your download, you would have a very difficult time in balancing the budget in the period of time you say you're going to. You may accomplish it, but you must ask yourself at what price you're accomplishing this, at what price to the municipalities and the property taxpayers in the province, and at what price to the children of this province in terms of the education they're receiving. You start taking another $1 billion out of education and it's going to be felt in the classroom. You can use all the nice words you like that cuts to education won't affect the classroom. You cannot take $1 billion out by reducing the number of trustees in the province. It's not possible to do.

I simply say that I have some difficulty with this resolution, although I appreciate the fact that a Tory government in Ontario, especially the neo-cons and the Reformers, simply couldn't go back home with their head held high if they didn't attempt to pass a resolution like this or even get it into the legislation of the province.

I appreciate where the Tories are coming from in this resolution. I just hope they've thought it all the way through.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): It's a pleasure this morning to be asked to speak on the member for Perth's resolution with respect to a balanced budget. Actually, it comes very easily to members from this side of the House, because we've committed, each and every one of us, to work towards balancing a budget. That's the fundamental of the Common Sense document. Most people would be familiar with it, and if not, they should certainly pick one up and become familiar with it.

It is the plan that made several commitments. I'm just going to bring people up to speed on what the commitment is. It is an integral plan, an integrated plan, the combination of a 30% provincial income tax rate reduction — we're going to reduce the income tax for every single hardworking Ontarian — and on our part we're going to have a "20% non-priority spending reduction and elimination of job-killing government barriers, which will make Ontario a magnet for new investment and new jobs and will get people back to work and the economy moving again." Clearly, the plan is a well-balanced plan of economic renewal, not more government expenditures.

I am going to return to this particular point of view throughout my comments, but I want to start by saying that there were a number of positions of attempting to achieve the same goal. If I may take the liberty of using another government's position, I'm going to recount, or recant — no, "recant" means retract — recount for you some of the responsibilities they committed to during the election period.

I'm not plagiarizing. I think it's important to understand that I believe they will be supporting the member for Perth's resolution this morning because they committed to it themselves, very clearly. I'll read directly from page 7, with your permission, Mr Speaker: "High deficits and big public debt are job-killers. Rising deficits" take money out of people's pockets. "Ontarians are paying more interest on debt." I'm going to go on: "A Liberal government will both preach financial restraint and practise it. Through the Ontario Liberal balanced budget plan, we will balance the provincial budget within four years."

At the time they and we were looking at it, we were looking at a deficit of some $10 billion or $11 billion. That's the shortfall, every year, of revenue to expenditures. How can you possibly balance the budget without reducing spending — unless, of course, their intent was to raise taxes. But no, they go on to say — and I give them all the credit in the world. They went part-way; they went to the middle. They said, "We will cut taxes" — imagine that; Gerry Phillips, the very guy who criticizes us every day — "by 5% during our first term." So clearly their plan was half of our plan.

How were they going to save the other $11 billion to get to that balanced budget in four years? They had to cut spending or raise taxes, as simple as that. They've already said they were going to cut taxes by 5%, so theoretically they were going to reduce spending in the order of $15 billion.

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): No.

Mr O'Toole: I'm not sure. Maybe yes, maybe no. It's important to keep it in mind.

I have the greatest respect for my good friend from Nickel Belt, because he has a great sense of humour and he's also seen inside the large vault in Ontario. He's been inside the vault. Mr Laughren, I believe, when he was in there saw the catastrophic conditions he was in. In fact, they tried to deal with the reduction of spending one way: the social contract. They cut every public sector employee

drastically, just like that, with the stroke of a pen, no debate.

I want to make a couple of points about how important Mr Johnson's budget plan is. I can do it by memory, really, because I know it so well. We spend more on interest than we do on education. To service the public debt, we spend more on interest than we do on education. That's just wrong.

1030

We also in my view have a plan that by reducing taxes — our public accounts record shows we've reduced taxes and increased revenue. That theory is well practised in many parts of the world. It's called a Laffer curve: by reducing taxes you can increase revenue. But what we promised for sure — I'm going to wrap up my comments here because I'm getting the cane.

We have got to balance the budget. That means you can't spend more than you earn. Every single Ontarian understands that. In my home I can't spend more than I earn. I would love to have two cars or three televisions or whatever, but I've got to spend within my means. Our plan encourages people getting back to work. We promised to create 725,000 new real jobs where people will create more income for the province, and to balance the budget and quit taxing people to death.

I would encourage you to stay tuned because all the way through while balancing the budget we've committed to health care; we're spending more on health care. We've committed to education. There will be no reductions to spending in the classroom. Any waste in administration or wherever should be addressed.

I'm going to save the rest of my time for the member for Perth. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this important issue of balanced budget legislation.

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I am pleased to join the debate on ballot item 101 presented by the member for Perth. At the outset I wish to laud the initiative and, at the end, I will be voting because of the principle the proposed ballot implies. But the content of it leaves me a little bit aghast, with respect to the content of the presentation itself.

As I said, the principle is a motherhood or fatherhood type of issue because it sounds good. If you were to speak to anyone and say: "Listen, we're going to impose on the politicians to balance the books; otherwise, within 90 days, if they present some increases, they will have to resign. They will have to go back to the people." Is this the type of government we really want? I don't think so. I don't think that if the facts were to be presented to the people of Ontario they would say, "Every 90 days you go to the polls."

The resolution being presented, as I said, is a good, sound principle, but the contents are totally flawed and will not work, unless of course we go back to resolution 13, as was done in Florida, "Don't touch the budget," but every time there is some expense that has to be incurred you go and tax the people in a different way.

I like to remind the Premier, Mr Harris, who was it who said any increase or any due or user fee, by any other name, is a tax increase? Is this what we are going to impose on the people of Ontario, that every time we want to increase taxes, to escape what we are proposing here, we are going to impose new user fees as we have done in the last couple of years? Wasn't it this now Premier, prior to the election, who said, "Oh no, we are not going to do that; we are not going to close hospitals; the envelope is sealed; we are not going to touch one penny from the education and health care systems"? But now we see a different story. They have been raising taxes by downloading on to the various local municipalities.

It calls for us to have this particular piece of legislation so that it would bind future governments so it wouldn't place Ontario citizens in a very precarious situation. We had a litany from the member for Durham East on how we have been promising and how we have been spending. For heaven's sake, I'm sure their memory is not so short. In 1989-90 we were the only government, after 40 years of Conservative government, that balanced the books, and we even had a surplus. Even they themselves said so in their own document.

We did it without promising 30%. For whom? Certainly the poor people don't see any of that money. If they really wanted to balance the books they could have done it without the 30%, without the 2001. They could have done it well before. This is what Liberal people were saying during the election and that's the way we should be looking at it.

Unfortunately, in three and a half or four minutes you can't say very much, but let me say to the member that I do compliment him for the initiative he has taken. But to bind any future government, to say that unless you bring in a balanced budget, or there is any increase, then within 90 days you will have to resign, I think is totally inappropriate and totally contrary to the principle of good government.

Mr O'Toole: Will you support it or not?

Mr Sergio: Yes, I did say that I will support it in principle but I have severe reservations, as the content of the initiative is totally flawed and it does really merit a long debate.

As a matter of fact, when you talk about a referendum, didn't Mr Harris say in Your Ontario, Your Choice to give them the choice every time you want to raise taxes? Doesn't it say, on your own page 5 here, "Nevertheless, the issue of cost must be addressed as part of an overall referendum strategy for Ontario"?

Why don't you do that before you come up with suggestions like this one here? Why don't you go to the people of Ontario? Give them the facts. Get the answer from them. But then again, we have seen the record of this government when it comes to bringing and posing issues in front of the people. They don't even listen, never mind giving them a chance to express themselves, and when they do, such as the Metro debate, 78% or 80% or whatever it was, the government didn't pay any attention.

Is this what we are saying to the people of Ontario, that we will bind future government? "Oh yes, of course, probably to clean up the mess that we are going to inherit from the previous government. That's the way it is going to work." I'm sorry, I don't think that's the way it should be working. Responsible government shouldn't have to have recourse to such a drastic need and I don't think the people of Ontario should be bound by such a strong and tight resolution.

As I said, I will support it because of the principle, but I have serious reservations on the content of the proposal.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I find this piece of business before the House this morning rather interesting and somewhat strange, given the track record and the activity of this government in its two and some years in power in this province. I find it actually quite hypocritical.

All the way through the election we heard this party, before it became government, talk about the deficit and how they were going to balance the budget and fight the deficit and bring the business of this province into the kind of constraint that only Conservatives have the ability to do.

It wasn't long after the election that we began to realize that in fact they didn't mean that. What they meant was they were going to turn the business of this province over to their buddies in the corporate sector and then they would do what they will with the finances of the province, and whether we reach a balanced budget or not became, all of a sudden, really not that important. What was more important was the tax break, making sure that all those people who bankrolled and supported and continue to bankroll and support the Progressive Conservative Party in Ontario and this government get all the rewards they possibly can in the shortest period of time.

If this government was really interested in balancing the budget, they would not be moving ahead as quickly as they are with the tax break they're putting in place that is just, in my mind and as we experience how it's playing out across the province, absolutely unrealistic.

This government is not in any way serious about balancing this budget. That's what makes this piece of business before us today so absolutely bizarre, so absolutely useless and so much public relations, so much ideological claptrap. I want to be on the record here today to say that.

If this government is interested at all in a balanced budget — and I don't think any government in its right mind wouldn't be. I think every government through the ages and that is sitting in power in Canada today would love, if they could, to balance the budget, but they know that the pushes and pulls, the constraints and the demands on government are such that you walk a very delicate tightrope. Any business I've known of, and I was part-owner of one before I got this job, walks that kind of tightrope. There's always this debt-to-equity ratio that you're continually looking at, and it's the same thing for a government, particularly a government that has any business acumen at all.

1040

To stand here today and listen to the members of the government get up and support this piece of business that talks about a balanced budget, having one for ever and a day after that, is frankly bordering on the ludicrous. As I said before, if they were really interested in a balanced budget, if they were really interested in the principles behind this bill that's in front of us today, they would immediately go to the finance minister and the Premier and say: "Let's back away from this tax break. Let's stop this nonsense of turning over literally billions of dollars to people in this province who don't need it, who are already well off, who already have what they need to do everything they need to do."

We see in the province today many business enterprises declaring historically record-high profits with every quarterly report they make. Some might say — and I talked to some friends out there, very hard-working constituents in Ontario — they are obscenely high profits, at the same time as this government is doing everything in its power to make sure those profits are even higher, by way of the tax break and some of the regulations they're putting in place.

They'll suggest that that money is creating more jobs. The reality actually is showing us that's not the case either, that this target they set for themselves of some 720,000 new jobs over the term of their government they're not even close to achieving.

Interjection: They're at 225,000.

Mr Martin: They've created 225,000. They're halfway through their mandate and they've created 225,000 of those jobs. There's absolutely no way they're going to do it. Those are the targets I think they should be focusing on. Bringing a piece of legislation here today to talk about balanced budgets when they have not reached and will not reach the targets they set for themselves during the election campaign is at best hypocritical.

I'll leave a little bit of time for my colleague.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): I'm pleased to rise in support of the resolution put forward by the member for Perth. One of the primary reasons I ran for office was this basic thing we're talking about here. I could no longer sit on the sidelines while governments continued to run up mammoth deficits and destroy the future of our children.

I could only describe what has happened for the last 15 years as irresponsible fiscal policy. The province today has a debt of over $100 billion. Interest payments on that $100 billion is over $9 billion a year. How could you say that this is anything other than criminal?

The spiralling deficits and the growing debt, if left unchecked, had the potential to destroy the very fabric of our social programs, including health care and welfare. This does not include the jeopardizing of our future economic wellbeing. The opposition parties continue to attack each and every attempt this government has made to bring its fiscal house to order. They have not yet made one positive contribution as to how we might accomplish this mammoth task.

As a result of the $100-billion debt, the children who today are age 15 will probably be 60 before the debt will be eliminated. We have saddled two entire generations with a massive debt, a financial burden, and they will have no benefits from that debt. We have done it to them.

In the Financial Post a couple days ago — Monday, I believe it was — there was an article on a recommendation that had been made to the federal government. It's a report issued by economists William Scarth and Harriet Jackson of McMaster University in Hamilton. One of their recommendations is that future tax cuts should focus almost wholly on reducing tax rates for wage earners rather than lowering taxes on capital or interest income. It seems to me that is what we as a government have been doing.

This report also talks about how the gross domestic product, I believe measured at $800 billion federally and $340 billion provincially, how the debt burden should only bear a rate of 15% of that gross domestic product. In Ontario we're sitting at 30%; federally we're sitting at about 75% or 80%. Obviously something has to be done. The only way that can be done is if we have balanced budgets. We must bring the debt under control.

It's really interesting that they talk about how this must be done within the next 20 to 25 years. Why? To compensate future workers. It must be done because we must treat wage earners fairly so they derive equal benefit from tax cuts. Son of a gun. Here we are talking about tax cuts for the average worker again. Isn't that what we've done as a government? That is what we will continue to do through balanced budget legislation.

I'm pleased to be able to talk about this because it is getting the balanced budget discussion on the table. Obviously we can't do it today, because we still have to fight the deficits. We can't do it tomorrow; we can't do it next year. But before the term of this government is out, we will have a balanced budget and we will be able to have balanced budget legislation on the books.

My time is short and I want to leave some time for the member for St Andrew-St Patrick. I just want to say that this balanced budget resolution places a much-needed focus on the issue and I look forward to the time when we will be able to introduce it.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott and Russell): I'm pleased to rise and speak on this motion this morning, because I believe it is very important for all the taxpayers of Ontario.

When we talk of a balanced budget it tends to mislead the people of Ontario, and every time you talk about the balanced budget, it definitely does. At the municipal and also the school board level, we have to come out with a balanced budget, but at times, when we have to have some capital investment, we borrow the money over a period of time. The payback could be 25, 40 years. It doesn't show as having an unbalanced budget, but the debt is going higher and higher.

I was listening to the member for Perth a little while ago. Every one of us does believe in a balanced budget, but remember one thing, and I think the people across the way should remember this too: At the present time this government is trying to have a balanced budget by the year 2000, but by the year 2000 I believe it is going to cost everyone in Ontario an additional $14 per month extra. How do I come up with this? It's because of the downloading; it's because of the user fees we are going to have.

I'm looking at the ambulance transfer to the municipalities. In the past, the government was paying $300 million a year

Only the city of Toronto had their own ambulance which was costing the city of Toronto in the area of $30 million a year. So the government is saving $300 million in ambulance services, but who's going to pay for it? The local people.

1050

I don't call it a real balanced budget. It's going to look good for this government; a balanced budget at the end of the year. We're looking at the year 2000 to have a balanced budget. In 1998 we're looking at a deficit of approximately $6 billion. If we look at all this downloading that we are doing, the assessment, for example, used to be done by the provincial government; now it is going to be every local taxpayer that will have to pay the assessment. It's going to be an average of $31 per household in Ontario.

Septic tank inspection is an average of $450 per inspection, per home that you are going to build. Who's going to pay for it? They'll have to increase the building permits for which the new home buyers are going to pay an average of $450 extra. How much is the transfer of provincial highways going to cost the local taxpayers? Again, it's going to be on local taxes.

The farm rebate tax: This government, when they made the announcement of the mega-week, January 13, 1997, said the farmers will have a saving of $175 million, in that area. Immediately, when we heard about it, I called the assessment office in our region and they told me there's no saving for the farmers directly, because they were already getting the 75% rebate from the provincial government. It is the provincial government that is going to have a $175-million saving. Who's going to pay for it? The local taxpayer; because there will be 75% less revenue from the farm tax at the local level. Who's going to pay for it again? It's the rest of the residential and commercial areas from each municipality.

I look at social housing, for example. Social housing was fully paid by the provincial government. Now it has been downloaded to the municipality. Sure, it looks good for this government. We will reduce the deficit. We will reduce it on the back of the local taxpayers.

Casinos at the present time: We will have a revenue —

The Deputy Speaker: Time has expired. Further debate?

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I want to start out by congratulating the member for Perth for what I consider to be a fine public relations exercise. That's really what we have right here, because what he's doing by this resolution is attempting to pass a resolution now to

bind the hands of any future governments, and I have this sneaking suspicion that the government in the years 2000 and 2001 isn't going to be a Progressive Conservative government.

If they really have any intentions of balancing the budgets, they should make those intentions known. They should balance the budgets now. Why can't they do that? Because they know that those choices are difficult and we shouldn't be binding the decision-making powers of future governments. That's why we're all elected here, to make those difficult decisions. I would suggest to the member for Perth and his colleagues in the Progressive Conservative government that if they really want to balance the budgets, do it now, and not to pursue this phoney tax cut scheme to benefit those who are most well off here in the province of Ontario. That's what it's really about.

My friend from Kitchener, when he had an opportunity to heckle during a previous member's speech, said tax cuts are going to lead to the creation of more jobs. We heard just this week in the city of Toronto, Campbell's Soup, a profitable company, is reducing its workforce by 12%. We've seen similar examples throughout the province of Ontario over the last few years. General Motors reduced 12,000 jobs. Imperial Oil reduced 4,000 jobs. Inco cut 2,000 jobs. Molson's reduced 6,000 jobs, and it goes on.

Ms Isabel Bassett (St Andrew-St Patrick): I'm delighted to have the opportunity today to speak on behalf of the balanced budget resolution brought forward by my colleague the member for Perth. This government is committed to the part of his resolution which deals with fiscal prudence and responsibility and the elimination of the deficit by the fiscal year of 2000-01. But we believe that the member for Perth's resolution is simply too restrictive and could limit the very role of government in certain circumstances.

There's no question about our fiscal responsibility. Since this government took office in 1995, we have remained committed to our promise to balance the budget in our mandate. Two years ago the province had a deficit of $11.3 billion, and I'm happy to report that that's now been reduced to $6.9 billion.

The government has not only reduced spending across the board but it has also restructured the delivery of its services. This is very important because it has created a new thinking here in Ontario. This makes us believe it's unlikely that governments will ever again run up deficits as they did in the past. However, in the unlikely circumstance of some unforeseen act of God, government might want and need the flexibility to overspend in order to minister to the needs of its citizens in dire emergency need. That's why this government cannot support the second part of the member for Perth's resolution which calls for the dissolution of a government that overspends.

I'm just looking because I know my time is running out. Our approach also is in keeping with the approach of other provinces across Canada. Quebec, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, none requires government to dissolve in the event of overspending or of creating a deficit. Government members are committed to the principle of balanced budget, and as I have shown today, our record proves that we are proceeding on target to achieve a zero deficit by 2000-01 and that we've restructured the delivery of services that will prevent and make it very unlikely that governments will run up deficits in the future.

In summary, I would like to say that this government is in favour of that part of the member for Perth's resolution that advocated balancing the provincial budget. Where we differ is with the resolution's requirement that governments who return a deficit must be dissolved. This said, I'd like to thank my colleague and friend from Perth for bringing forward this important resolution. This government's fiscal plan is on track but it always does help to be reminded of our fiscal responsibility.

Mr Bert Johnson: I'd like to thank all the members who spoke to my resolution today. I feel that the ideas and opinions brought forward will go a long way towards making this type of fiscal responsibility a legislative requirement for the province of Ontario. It has not surprised me that members of the New Democratic Party — I'm sorry, the Old Democratic Party — will not be supporting this. They have given their lifelong support to spending money they do not have.

What does surprise me a little bit are the comments from some of the members, and I'm glad to see that the members for Renfrew North, St Catharines and Scarborough-Agincourt are here, because I'd like to remind them that they were part of the government that balanced its books, according to them, in 1989. I want to tell you just a little bit about how they did that.

I have in front of me a bill that was assented to on March 2, 1989. On its third page, it says, "This act shall be deemed to have come into force on the 2nd day of May 1988." For those of you who remember back in those days, that was when the provincial sales tax was increased from 7% to 8%. Some may say, "Well, that was a 1% increase." Those members must have chuckled around the cabinet table when their spin doctor told them, "Tell the people of Ontario that that was a 1% increase," because it was designed to take out of the pockets of the hardworking people of Ontario over 14% more tax.

I hope this resolution will pass through with the support of the members today, so that we can begin to move to a future where Ontario government is more accountable to the people of Ontario. I'd like to thank the participants for their participation in the debate.

1100

EXOTIC ANIMALS CONTROL ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LA RÉGLEMENTATION DES ANIMAUX EXOTIQUES

Mr Parker moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to regulate the keeping of Exotic Animals / Projet de loi 159, Loi visant à réglementer la garde d'animaux exotiques.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Pursuant to standing order 95(c)(i), the honourable member has 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr John L. Parker (York East): It's my privilege to rise in the House this morning as sponsor of Bill 159, an act to provide for the licensing of exotic animals. At present —

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): Does that include John Hastings?

Mr Parker: No, but it does include the member for Sudbury.

At present, Ontario has no legislation which addresses the possession of exotics. Ontario and Manitoba are the only provinces in Canada which lack any form of provincial control over the possession of or trade in exotic animal species. Bill 159 is intended to bring Ontario into line with the rest of the country in this regard, or, as the August 28 issue of the London Free Press so clearly put it, in Ontario you can "adopt a baby racoon from the wild...and you can expect to get busted." But if "you want to own a 135-pound jaguar that could rip a person's throat out in a matter of seconds, feel free." It's precisely this incongruity that Bill 159 will remedy.

I recognize that our farmers in this province are in a mode of diversifying these days and it's not the intention of this bill to restrict that phenomenon. I'm prepared to work with my rural colleagues and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to add such amendments to my bill as are appropriate or necessary to clearly allow Ontario agriculture to diversify as it presently is doing.

My rural colleagues have made me aware that in recent years our farmers have branched out into new areas such as farming ostriches, emus, llamas, fish and other species which are not native to Ontario. I support those efforts; in fact my rural colleagues campaigned in the last election in favour of legislation which would support agricultural diversification in Ontario and I support them in that initiative.

By passing Bill 159, this House would enable Ontario to establish a consistent, uniform approach to the control of the conditions under which exotic species could be possessed, owned, traded, kept and displayed. Standards could be established and enforced for the protection of both the public and the animals themselves. Bill 159 would address the phenomenon of the exotic animal owners who are chased out of one community by the passage of a bylaw only to set up shop in a nearby community that has not yet chosen to establish a bylaw.

Also, by establishing a province-wide standard and establishing some control over the possession of exotics, Bill 159 might serve to discourage the spread of exotic animal possession and limit the possession of exotics to legitimate zoos which have the expertise and physical resources to handle each species appropriately.

How widespread is the phenomenon of the ownership of exotic animals in Ontario? Precisely the fact that no regulatory regime exists at present makes it difficult to assemble complete and reliable data on this point. One owner-breeder, however, of exotics estimates that over 2,000 large cats are kept by private individuals in this province as house pets. This exceeds the number of tigers kept in the major legitimate zoos in the province.

There's every reason to believe that this figure of 2,000 could be just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. My community of East York is home to Zoocheck, a volunteer organization which has put hours of research into this matter. According to Rob Laidlaw of Zoocheck, lions, tigers, monkeys and venomous snakes are all common throughout the province. They are widely advertised for sale in publications which are freely available to the public and can be purchased for anywhere from $50 to $1,500. Some vendors will take your order over the phone and deliver right to your door, no questions asked.

You can order right from a catalogue Bengal tigers, Siberian tigers, jaguars, ocelots, lions, camels, you name it. Many of these creatures are kept as pets. Many others are put on public display for commercial purposes in what are promoted as "zoos" but which are probably more accurately described as private menageries.

Setting up a so-called zoo is not hard to do and it isn't even expensive. On any day of the week, you can start out from Toronto with a truck and $1,000 in your pocket and by evening pick up a monkey, a couple of tiger cubs, a wallaby, maybe a few mambas and spitting cobras and other small exotic animals and still have change in your pocket. You can put them all on display in any community in Ontario, apart from the few that have passed prohibitive bylaws, and call yourself a zoo.

Zoocheck estimates that there are about 60 such menageries throughout the province and more seem to be opening each year. No provincial authority exists to inspect the quality of living conditions or habitations or the conditions of confinement in these operations.

By contrast, Ontario has only five zoos which are accredited as such by CAZPA, a group to which the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo belongs which administers on a voluntary basis a set of standards to be adhered to by any organization in Ontario wishing to be considered a legitimate zoo.

An accredited zoo will take great care to provide for the proper care of its animals and for the safety of the animals and the visiting public. They all feature perimeter fencing, double doors, appropriate stand-off barriers and other safety measures. There is no provincial authority or standard in place, however, to apply the same precautions to menageries. Typically, menageries do not have these features.

What are the risks posed by the unrestricted possession of exotic species? Many people who acquire an exotic animal as a pet are completely unprepared for the problems they bring upon themselves, their neighbours and their animals. Many believe that if you acquire an exotic animal as a pet at an early age and raise it as a house pet, the animal will grow up to be as domesticated as a regular dog or cat. Most people don't realize that domestic dogs and cats are the products of hundreds, sometimes thousands of years of domestic breeding. Most dogs and cats

are by now genetically conditioned to have characteristics that make them suitable to be trained as family pets.

This can't be achieved in a single generation by taking a tiger cub into your home and bottle-feeding it from infancy. To put it simply, you can take the tiger out of the jungle but you can't take the jungle out of the tiger. People are surprised to find that as their exotic pet grows up, it turns into a creature whose behaviour they cannot predict and which may respond to its natural predatory instincts without warning. Periodically, an animal will turn on its owner, leading to serious injury or death.

In 1992, a Brampton man was crushed and suffocated to death by a python he kept in his residence as a pet. In 1994, in Wiarton a 16-year-old was attacked and killed by a tiger kept by his uncle as a pet. In the coroners' inquiries which ensued in each of these cases, the juries recommended that provincial legislation be enacted to prevent a recurrence of such events. In my submission, the present bill responds to exactly these recommendations.

From time to time, an exotic animal will escape from captivity, putting an entire community at risk. The animal can present a threat to other animals kept by the same owner, to humans, to pets, to farm animals and to wildlife. Thousands of hours have been consumed by authorities in this province in tracking down and apprehending escaped exotics. Often it takes days or weeks to capture an escaped animal. There are some cases on record of escaped exotics being on the loose for years and in still other cases the escaped animal is never found.

Owners of exotic animals which have outgrown their welcome also find that they are impossible to get rid of. They often try to donate the animal to their local zoo, only to find that no responsible zoo will take on an animal whose pedigree is unknown. In the end, their only recourse is to turn the animal over to a private menagerie or have it destroyed.

The present bill also provides for controls to be put in place to address the issue of the welfare of the animal itself. At present, there are many accounts of exotic animals being kept under conditions that can only be described as squalid and inhumane. There are accounts of animals being undernourished, provided with unpotable water, lacking adequate shelter, suitable cages and living space.

It can occur anywhere. In my own neighbourhood in Toronto, right in a residential area there was until recently a storefront operation calling itself an animal sanctuary in which exotic animals were kept and occasionally put on display. Eventually, steps were taken to have the enterprise shut down, whereupon the problem was merely shifted to another community. However, before it closed, the premises were inspected and were found to be home to many different species, including several large cats which were kept in small cages in the basement. These animals were found to have suffered from lack of nourishment, lack of natural light, lack of fresh air, lack of living space and lack of exercise.

Ontario, apart from Manitoba, is the only province in this country which does not have a uniform set of provisions to address the matter of the possession of exotic animals. This bill seeks to correct that situation.

I hope my brief remarks this morning have helped to illustrate the need for such legislation, and that this bill will have the support of members of this House.

1110

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I am also pleased to join the debate on Bill 159, proposed by the member for Scarborough Centre. It is a good topic. I think it's timely as well, even though I have to say at the outset that there are quite a few municipalities in Ontario that have adopted a policy of no exotic pets within their own boundaries. Then there are some others that have limited it. This is an area I wish to touch on later on during my presentation with respect to the number of exotic pets or animals.

The bill as it is presented is totally silent with respect to the number of exotic animals kept as pets or stuff like that. It's something the member may want to take into consideration, to have the proposed Bill 159 changed to include the number of exotic pets or whatever. Sometimes they are used as pets; often they are used for gain, let's say employment in some circuses or acts, and we have seen very recently in some establishments within Metro Toronto that such an animal, a tiger I believe, was being used to assist in whatever type of show was being conducted in one of these establishments.

Yes, that is a concern. Although people may feel comfortable in a particular place if the owner or attendant is with that particular animal, you have no idea at what time the wild animal instinct may show up and cause panic or harm to people in attendance.

The bill proposes to establish a licence for persons above the legal age, and for a number of persons the regulations provide they may have such a licence. There are a number of exotic animals held in Ontario that are not native to our own environment. How do we apply the licence to people who wish to possess such an exotic animal?

I'm sure there are a number of species, qualities of animals that we could attribute such a definition as "exotic animals" to. I don't have to tell you that we have, for example, pet stores that have exotic animals which parents buy for their kids as pets. It's not only the licence of the person acquiring the exotic pets; it's also the people who eventually will maintain or look after it, or if used by children as pets, how they are being handled and stuff like that.

Sometimes we hear of infectious diseases caused by animals as well, not only exotic but also native to Ontario. The legislation should address that aspect as well, where exotic animals should be totally banned where such an animal may be of a species that may cause health hazards to humans.

If the legislation is not done — I know this is for second reading —— and the requirements are not final, are not presented totally to us, it should not deny, as we move along with this piece of legislation, that some children would love to have an exotic animal. I'm not talking of lions or tigers or boa constrictors or stuff like

that. It could be a number of other species that would do well for some children, but perhaps the parents or guardians are not in favour of having to get a licence to acquire one of these exotic pets for their children.

That's one area where I think some accommodation should be made. According to the type of exotic animal, we could make some necessary accommodation so kids may enjoy the pleasures of an exotic pet, providing that the legislation would allow for that. Of course, we are talking of minors.

Meeting the standards: This is a case where it depends on the type of exotic pets. I'm speaking with respect to some experience we had when we dealt with legislation in the city of North York, In that particular legislation, we arrived at it because of the many complaints not only of a variety of snakes and stuff like that, but we were receiving complaints about boa constrictors and racoons and other animals — even though racoons are native to Ontario — that perhaps were not so docile to the environment in which they found themselves.

It's important that we specify the type of environment for a specific exotic animal or pet — if it's something that can be kept indoors, if it's something that can or should be kept outdoors, and what kind of provisions, what kind of conditions we are going to impose on the owner of that animal or pet so it does not endanger the vicinity or the neighbours. It's important that we specify, unless we ban totally, under what conditions those exotic pets or animals are maintained.

The legislation should address very seriously, if this is going to pass and in time become law, how we are going to look at this later on. We know the difficulties we have when it comes to inspections and enforcing of regulations, enforcing of standards. I know there are grace periods, grace times, and that is done mainly through the various local municipalities and local property standards and bylaws and so forth.

I don't have to tell you that the municipalities are crying, with all the cuts they are receiving, that they won't be able to afford the number of inspectors to provide inspections of those conditions on a regular basis, and inspections of the condition of the animal itself, let alone what it may be causing in the immediate neighbourhood. Proper attention should be directed to that as well.

One area we have to take into consideration is, for example, section 17(3) that deals with the powers of entry of such an inspector on behalf of the province or the municipality. At this stage I really am not sure if the province should be getting into the total control of that or leaving it to the local municipalities.

1120

Don't we know that the provincial government is passing on — not mentioning the infamous word "down-loading" — to the local municipalities many other and more stringent responsibilities and regulations. This is an area where the local municipalities can do it on their own and have their own regulations, have their own controls, without being so sanctimonious and saying, "This is what we're going to do." But that's fine. It's a good argument. It's something we can all identify with. I'm sure it's something the public will be happy is being addressed, so we move along. In due course, if we are speaking to the new city of Toronto, they can address that themselves in the future and changes can be made. But I think it also addresses the other municipalities in Ontario.

As I was saying, subsection 17(3) deals with power of entry. That is not clear, as presented in this bill. Are we saying an inspector can automatically demand to walk into a house solely on, let's say, a telephone call they may have received from a neighbour that such an exotic animal is being kept? Before an inspector assumes that power, I think he or she must ascertain himself or herself that indeed an exotic animal stays or lives, with a licence, at that particular place.

I don't have to tell anyone with municipal experience that on an ongoing basis we get a number of calls that there is such and such an animal or whatever problem or whatever noises at such and such an address. It often turns out that we send inspectors on a wild goose chase only because two neighbours may have a problem between themselves and indeed there is no such complaint.

In my own case, there have been complaints about rabbits and chickens, even pigeons — they are not exotic — hundreds at this particular address. Once the inspector goes, he says, "Do I have the wrong address?" because there isn't any such thing. Before we send inspectors and probably create even more problems among neighbours in a particular neighbourhood, if the power is given to an inspector to say, "I want to come in," we ensure that the inspector ascertains that there is a problem, there is a pet at that particular address.

Describing the species and type: I want to add that it is important that we define the number of allowable exotic animals per person, if you will; per applicant or per licence. I'm not sure that I would like to see that one licence allows three tigers or five pythons or stuff like that. The more we allow, the more difficult it's going to be to supervise, to control, to take care of, to manage more than one of those exotic animals.

If we are speaking of larger animals, not — I have no idea — birds perhaps. We know the species that are very common here in Canada, in Ontario, but there are many other species that are foreign to our climate and our country. I think we should specify some ways — I don't see it in the legislation, but I'm sure that when we get to the nitty-gritty, this is going to be addressed. Perhaps the number of exotic animals should be limited to either one or two, sometimes maybe none; some others can be maybe two or three or four.

In the case of North York, for example, we say, "Not more than one rabbit if you're gong to keep it as a pet," or, "No more than three" — I believe, if I remember well — "chickens or roosters per family if they are considered as pets." This should be taken into consideration.

Also — and I haven't seen it in the proposed regulation here — exotic animals are kept by a circus, let's say, and from time to time we do have a travelling circus from town to town, city to city. I have no idea if that particular

area is covered by some other piece of legislation or that we should incorporate it in this one.

I had a few more things to say, but time goes fast. As I said, I will support the intent of the motion.

Mr Laughren: May I first of all commend my friend from York East for bringing forward this private member's bill. It's one which I have no hesitancy in supporting. I think it's long overdue. I think he said that every other province has such legislation. It is strange that we don't have it yet in this province. As I understand his bill, it means there must be a licensing system for anybody who has, under their charge, any exotic animal from outside the province, outside Ontario — not just Canada, but from outside Ontario — if they're found in the wild in their natural habitat.

The licensing is necessary. I don't know how else you control it if you don't have licensing. I noticed in this bill that other classes can be added by regulation. If this bill were to pass, they can simply add new ones to it. Believe me, I take this bill seriously; I would not want to be frivolous. But I assume they're keeping in reserve being able to add classes, so that in the dark of the night this government can bring the member for Etobicoke-Rexdale-Bedrock under protection of this act as well, without bringing it before the Legislature. I say that in an affectionate way, of course.

There are a couple of parts that bother me. One is the investigators. I don't know where you're going to get these investigators, because your government has cut back so much — in the Ministry of the Environment, for example, in the Ministry of Natural Resources — that they're already unable to do the job they're supposed to be doing. If you think you're going to convince your government to hire inspectors for the monitoring of exotic animals, when they won't provide enough to monitor the environment, I think you're dreaming in Technicolor. However, I am not questioning the principles involved or the intentions of the member for York East. I support him 100%.

The other area that bothers me a bit — and I think the member for York East is trained in the legal profession. At least he has the insouciance, the sophistication, the panache of someone who's been called to the bar — maybe many times; I don't know. I'm not trained in the legal profession, but I think the member for York East is. I was surprised at the ability of the registrar to refuse a licence, revoke a licence or refuse to allow one to be renewed without a hearing, to just do it. I worry about that. Are there not some rules of natural justice that say you should have to hold some kind of hearing so this issue can be aired and a person can have his or her day in court? It just seems to me that would be unusual. I find it passing strange that the member for York East would put that into his bill.

I think it's too onerous to say that if I go before the registrar and indicate that I would like to have a licence for the keeping of exotic animals, the registrar can just sit there and say, "No, I refuse," just write me a letter and say, "No." As a matter of fact, he doesn't even have to put it in writing, as I understand the bill; the registrar doesn't have to give reasons in writing for decisions. I find that a bit autocratic and draconian. I ask the member for York East to respond to that if he would, if he has time at the conclusion of this debate.

1130

But in principle I support his bill. I suspect there's not one of us who hasn't gone to a zoo or someplace to view animals, to take out children and so forth to see the animals. I suspect most of us have a certain pang of almost guilt when we see these incredible caged animals. Even though I'm not suggesting that we ban all zoos — I wouldn't go that far — I still have a pang of guilt whenever I go into a zoo and see these incredible caged animals. It's simply not a nice life sentence for these animals, whether they're exotic or otherwise.

I can certainly remember in Ontario seeing the black bear, which is domestic to Ontario, of course, penned up. There used to be a place on Highway 7 near Kaladar, a service station and a restaurant, and there was a cage there with a black bear in it that was pacing back and forth. It was not a large fenced area either; it really was a cage. I always felt that was not appropriate.

I suspect that while there are rules applied to animals in Ontario that are captured and kept, perhaps this could be done in one bill. Actually, the Game and Fish Act could have been expanded when it was brought for amendments to this House not too long ago. I can't remember when it was, but there were amendments made to the Game and Fish Act, and it should have been, I feel, included in those amendments so that we wouldn't be dependent upon the very good intentions of the member for York East through a private member's bill. However, that's passed now, and I simply wish to commend the member for York East for bringing this before the Legislature this morning.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): It is a pleasure to assist the member for York East on the second reading of Bill 159. When the member asked me to address the issues in the bill, I reminisced and thought of some of the municipal bylaws that I was involved in, which I'll report to the House later.

This is an act to regulate the keeping of exotic animals; this isn't about keeping lions and tigers and bears. I think there are really two key issues. The two key issues here are the need to protect both the exotic animals or pets and also humans or the community. To protect and regulate is exactly what this bill is about: the licensing. It goes into some detail under regulations.

The other important aspect for me in the debate is to acknowledge that I don't support the keeping of personal pets of exotic varieties that could be a danger to both the keeper and to the community, certainly not in an unregulated environment, but with regulation I suspect that's a step closer to having a safe situation. But we need to ensure that we recognize both public and private zoos that conform to safe keeping of animals, whatever that is, and we need to recognize legitimate farm practices that prevail in Ontario with the diversification of the agricultural sector.

As I said at the beginning, I want to start with a few comments of a personal nature about what my riding of Durham East has had to deal with. When I was on local council, we passed an exotic animal bylaw, and I'll go into some detail on that in a few moments. Durham East is home to a couple of very famous, well-respected, well-recognized animal zoos, if you will. I'm going to cite them for the members.

We have the oldest private zoo in Ontario, perhaps in Canada, the Bowmanville Zoo. A very good friend of mine, Michael Hackenberger, and his partner operate that. They have very well-known tigers, but more importantly, elephants, used in commercials and featured in many movies. Michael Hackenberger is a professionally trained trainer. As well, I believe he has a background in zoology and animal husbandry. That zoo, by the way, is private; there's no public money, not like the Metro zoo or other public zoos throughout the world. It is recognized as part of the CAZPA, which, as Mr Parker mentioned, is sort of a self-regulating body. There's the Bowmanville zoo.

We also have in Durham East the Orono Exotic Cat World. Many of you may have seen that as you've driven up 35, 115 to Peterborough, east of Bowmanville, east of Orono. Exotic Cat World is also a very well-respected place, abode, zoo, whatever, for exotic cats primarily. I know the zookeeper family there personally. They are trained, they are involved, and they treat these animals almost as if they're pets, but they also have the proper storage and feeding facilities for the animals, so they're able to deal with a very complex problem.

I look around the riding, and on a different level we've got the Cadmus Country Club, which is a private trout farm. It's just a beautiful place to go. It's north of Bowmanville, in Blackstock, a little community. That could perhaps, in somebody's vocabulary, be illegitimate.

But one of the more famous ones I want to mention from Durham East is Bill and Paula Lishman. Bill Lishman is well known for the movie Fly Away Home, the Canada geese that were trained to fly in unison behind his little ultralight aircraft. There was a movie made of it, a very widely viewed and respected movie. In this definition, he may have been considered illegitimate, but I think he treated these wild birds as pets, more or less. But again, the animal itself sometimes needs protection in certain situations.

I go looking further, and my riding of Durham East is a fairly large agricultural riding. In my riding I know there are keepers of buffalo, emu, ostrich, mink, chinchilla, llama, and of course there would be the elk and red deer and fallow deer.

I know another family that's in the business of keeping wild birds. They operate a game farm, for release for pheasant hunts and things like that.

But on another level, in my riding there are people who have pets such as parrots and monkeys and other kinds of animals that could be defined as exotic. So it's about time; there was some need to regulate.

I'm going to move to the most important observation of why the municipality of Clarington passed a bylaw. The bylaw is 93-161, passed in the year 1993. I was on the council. I was a local councillor at the time. Mr Parker mentioned that an animal sanctuary moved from East York. Well, guess where it moved? It moved to Clarington, then called Newcastle. Of course that's another story. We were Newcastle, Ontario; now we're Clarington. That's another story, but Clarington is east of Oshawa. This exotic menagerie moved in, and the neighbours were just wild, furious, threatened. What do you do? Improper fencing and housing and care of the animals: Of course any civilized person would be concerned. These pets didn't ask for that situation.

I respect Mr Parker. There need to be regulations. Any person keeping any kind of animal needs to follow proper regulations or standards. I think most people who use them as domestic animals, whether it's horses or whatever, have a long practice of respecting the care and treatment of the animal.

I also must mention the member for St Andrew-St Patrick, Ms Isabel Bassett. Her Bill 153 deals with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

More specifically, why I wanted to comment on this bill, in the remaining minute I have, is to recognize that the member for York East is clearly on record as saying he is willing, as this goes into committee, to deal with the issues surrounding the Ministry of Agriculture.

1140

My riding is an agricultural riding, and I would have the member know that exotic animal husbandry or farm animals that I mentioned and outlined need to be recognized as domestic or regular farm practices. We just went through the Farm Practices Protection Act and in that we fully want to diversify farm practices, but they aren't the same thing as I described, the animal sanctuary of these wild lions, tigers and bears running around the country. We can't accept that. That's just not acceptable. It's not an appropriate kind of thing.

Our bylaw in the municipality of Clarington went on to clearly schedule and itemize the proper storage and use of particular animals. I think it also talked to the need to recognize what were domestic occasions, and there were some licensing aspects and some inspection aspects for each of the animals named in the schedules.

I'm going to support the member's bill and I'm going to support it with the full recognition that he is going to work with the Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Noble Villeneuve, to make the proper amendments, recognizing the diversification of farm practices in Ontario today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I want to commend the member for York East for bringing forward this bill which deals with exotic animals in captivity in Ontario. As has been said, this is a bill that is long overdue.

It's really not a surprise that it comes up during private members' time because, as legislators, we often become overwhelmed by other issues that we face in our communities, issues that affect health care, education, and working conditions for people who work in our commun-

ities as well. So it's good that during private members' time the member has come forward with a bill of this nature.

This is a bill that not only is going to deal with the conditions that animals are being kept in but also is going to provide some control for the government on where these animals are kept, who is keeping them and what conditions they are going to be kept in.

We've seen over the past few years a real escalation in the illegal traffic of exotic species into countries like Canada. It's a worldwide problem and it's depleting species in countries in South America and Central America and Africa, places like that where exotic species of animals, what we would term exotic species of animals but of course they're native in those locations, are now becoming endangered because of the market demands for exotic species here in Ontario, for example.

That's one area where I think a bill like this is going to be able to provide some much-needed control and some legitimacy for that market so that people who are going to be importing exotic animals into Ontario aren't going to do it in conditions that are going to actually result in the death of many of those animals, because that's what happens to them when they're being imported illegally into Ontario. We don't want to be seen to be continuing to deplete species in other countries like Mexico and Costa Rica, for example.

I think it's going to go some way in reducing the incidence of the transmission of diseases that come along sometimes with exotic animals that come from outside the country. These are diseases that may be passed on, not only to animals of that same species but to other animals in Ontario that are important as far as our agricultural industry, that we really don't have any awareness of or ability to deal with. That's an issue that may be addressed as well.

I come from the city of Windsor and had an opportunity when I was a lawyer with the legal department at the city to have drafted an animal control bylaw in the city of Windsor which had a definition of exotic species of animals, and it has an absolute prohibition on the possession of exotic animals within the city of Windsor. Exotic animals in that bylaw are defined as animals that are not indigenous to Ontario. In the city of Windsor the only people who are able to possess these types of animals are people who are running pet shops and people who have circuses. There are no zoos in the city of Windsor. There may be some other exemptions, but I haven't looked at the bylaw for a while and I don't remember exactly what it was.

The other thing the bylaw contains is that anyone can only possess two of any animal that is indigenous to Ontario as pets. This really leads me into one of the concerns I do have about the bill, and that is with respect to the powers of investigation.

In section 15 it says, "The minister or a person authorized in writing by the minister may appoint an investigator for" various purposes under the act. I know in our area, in trying to enforce animal control bylaws, the difficulties that investigators have had in trying to not only gain access into properties, but also deal with the animals they find and deal with the conditions they find in those, many times, residential properties.

On occasion we've found people with hundreds of domestic cats, for example, but living in conditions that are really substandard and conditions that are contributing to disease and malnutrition in those animals. We know the difficulties that enforcement officers have, the resources that need to be allocated, just to undertake searches of residences for a somewhat simple matter like that.

This is legislation that's going to require some resources to provide enforcement mechanisms. The member for Yorkview, in his remarks, indicated that he was looking for something in the legislation that dealt with actual living conditions for animals. I'm happy to see in section 21 in the regulation-making provisions of this bill it provides that regulations can be made prescribing standards for the premises and conditions for keeping exotic animals and the standards for the premises and the conditions in which a licensee is authorized to keep or have possession of exotic animals.

Those are important provisions. We need to make sure that if we are going to license people to possess exotic animals, there are some means to ensure that the premises on which they're keeping those animals are up to standard, that they're not contributing to the spread of disease, they're not contributing to malnutrition of animals, they're not conditions that are basically unhealthy for exotic animals.

That's going to require some investigative resources. The minister who is responsible for this act is going to need more than "an investigator." There is going to have to be a team of investigators in the province who are going to be responsible for the enforcement of this legislation, and I would suggest that this isn't a responsibility that should be downloaded to municipalities and to the local law enforcement people in our communities. We do have inspectors from the Ministry of Natural Resources now who investigate matters of a similar nature, also I would suspect from agriculture and food as well, but clearly these aren't people who are trained in the conditions that exotic species of animals are going to have to be kept in. So that's something I have a concern about as well.

In closing, I do want to commend the member for York East for bringing this legislation forward. It is something we do need and is going to benefit exotic species of animals here in Ontario and those who wish to keep them here in Ontario. I hope we pass this bill today and I look forward to further debate with respect to some of the issues that have been raised here this morning.

1150

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Scarborough West.

Mr Jim Brown (Scarborough West): I am pleased to be able to speak on my colleague's bill —

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I thought I took the floor first here. Are we going in alphabetical order?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognized the first one who stood up, which was the member for Scarborough West.

Mr Jim Brown: I am pleased to be able to speak on my colleague's bill, An Act to regulate the keeping of Exotic Animals. I have a deep concern for animal welfare and have spoken many times in this House about our animal friends.

I would like to thank the member for York East for addressing the problems of regulating the ownership of exotic animals. We must work to ensure that no animal is abused and that laws are in place to prevent abuse of exotic animals and at the same time protect the public.

My colleague's bill, as it now stands, highlights some concerns to the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services. The development of a system of registration and licensing could create significant costs. Red tape and regulations cost the taxpayers and this concerns our ministry. There must be a balance between cost and effectiveness.

There is also matter of whether such a registry would fall under provincial or municipal jurisdiction. I would invite my colleague to work with the ministry to find an effective and cost-efficient way to regulate the care and use of exotic animals. It is possible this bill could be amended to give the municipalities the responsibility for registering and looking after the regulation of exotic animals.

With some changes, should this bill pass second reading, I believe this bill could be a valuable asset in helping to protect animals from mistreatment and to protect the public from possibly dangerous situations.

Every animal in captivity is in complete and total dependence on its owner. When there is such dependence, there is a danger of abuse and neglect and we can't tolerate that.

There was an incident near my riding this week where a pit bull terrier was found chained to a tree by the edge of the Scarborough Bluffs. The dog was left in such a way that investigators believe the owner intended for the dog to fall over the cliff and hang itself from its chain. A month ago a cat was hanged in Scarborough. This was another pet killed by insensitive human hands.

Abuse of animals is not limited to domestic animals. The motion picture Project X received widespread criticism following allegations that the monkeys used in the film were beaten to get them to perform for the cameras.

Under the definition of "exotic animal" in this bill are included all animals "not native to Ontario" that are normally found in the wild. I believe my colleague is working on this definition to make it more applicable.

Animal welfare legislation in this province has not undergone any dramatic change since 1919 and it needs a review. My colleagues from York East and St Andrew-St Patrick have both given this House good ideas.

Before I conclude, I must relate to this House the public's concern over animal welfare. Holly, the dog that was dragged behind a car last year for disciplinary purposes, spurred more calls to the Solicitor General's office than any other case except the Bernardo case. When puppies were allegedly flushed down a toilet about a month ago, their story was front-page news. The public cares intensely.

I support my colleague's goal and think that this bill is a good idea in general, subject to amendments.

Mr Preston: I have to agree with my colleague from Durham East in his remarks regarding zoos. The Nickel Belt representative said that he feels a pang of remorse when he sees a caged animal, but we must remember that our regulated zoos are the only repository for a very great number of animals that are becoming extinct. If it weren't for our regulatory zoos we would have no more California condor, the sandhill crane, panda bears and the list goes on. Our regulated zoos are really creating a great benefit for our civilization because it's tomorrow that we have to worry about.

I have to congratulate the member for York East on this bill. It's going to mean an awful lot of work for him because the definition of "exotic animal," as has been stated by everybody, is going to be very difficult to pin down. A person who has a chameleon that they wear on their collar or the person who has the 500-pound tiger: Where in between those do we draw the line?

I'd like to thank Mr Sergio from Yorkview who spoke about the wild goose, the goose chase he called it. I had people complain about noise in the back of my property, and when the police got there they came to complain about barking dogs but indeed it was wild geese. So they were on a wild goose chase.

Enforcement is going to be a problem. But the bill in its inception is for the good of the people and the good of the animals. The member for York East has said in his second statement, "I'm prepared to listen and make changes so that it fits." Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for York East, you have two minutes.

Mr Parker: Thank you to all who commented here this morning. I'd like to use some of the remaining two minutes available to me to acknowledge and thank some of the people who have been very central in advising me on this matter, some of whom are here to support it this morning: Joan Henry; Rob Laidlaw, Andrea Villiers and Holly Penfound from Zoocheck — Rob and Andrea in particular have been very helpful in guiding me through this process; Silia Smith, executive director of the World Society for the Protection of Animals Canada, Patrick Tohill, communications officer for the World Society for the Protection of Animals Canada; Stephanie Brown, past president, Canadian Federation of Humane Societies; and Liz White, director of the Animal Alliance of Canada. I am grateful for their support and for the advice they have been able to give me directly or indirectly.

I want to thank the members for Yorkview, Nickel Belt, Durham East, Windsor-Riverside — and I welcome the member for Windsor-Riverside back to this House after his brief vacation; I haven't had the occasion to do that yet and I'm happy to have the opportunity this

morning to do so — and the members for Scarborough West and Brant-Haldimand for their remarks this morning. I take very seriously the cautions they have raised. I think their concerns are fair, legitimate and deserve attention. I look forward to working with them if this bill gets the favour of this House on second reading and has the opportunity to proceed for further study.

I'm grateful in particular for what I think was support from the member for Nickel Belt. I'm grateful for the same sort of effusive, unqualified support he gave to this bill that I was so pleased to give to his candidacy for Speaker of this chamber. When an NDP member calls your bill "autocratic and draconian," I know they love you and I appreciate that very much.

BALANCED BUDGET

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): We will deal first with ballot item number 101 standing in the name of Mr Johnson. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

EXOTIC ANIMALS CONTROL ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LA RÉGLEMENTATION DES ANIMAUX EXOTIQUES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): We will now deal with ballot item number 102 standing in the name of Mr Parker. Mr Parker has moved second reading of Bill 159. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr John L. Parker (York East): Mr Speaker, I move that this bill be referred to the standing committee on general government.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1159 to 1334.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent from the members of the Assembly that all three caucuses have the opportunity to pay tribute to World Teachers' Day this Sunday, October 5.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Do we have consent to pay tribute to World Teachers' Day, October 5? Agreed?

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I understand that one of our members already has a statement in that regard. This request came in very late in the day. Since one of our members is going to make a statement on this matter, perhaps the opposition may wish to consider making such a statement on Monday, during their members' statements.

The Speaker: So I take that as a no.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COLLÈGE BORÉAL

M. Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury) : Bienvenue au Collège Boréal. C'est avec grand plaisir que je souhaite officiellement la bienvenue aux membres de la communauté du Collège Boréal en tant que composante du monde de l'éducation de Sudbury et bien sûr du nord de l'Ontario. Il ne fait nul doute que le Collège Boréal a déjà eu des effets positifs sur notre communauté. Nous savons qu'il sera un partenaire important dans la croissance du nord de l'Ontario.

Les membres de l'administration, du personnel et les étudiants et étudiantes du Collège Boréal devraient être fiers que leur rêve soit devenu réalité. L'édifice, l'emplacement et la technologie utilisée dans cette institution et dans l'ensemble du nord de l'Ontario sont autant de signes tangibles de sa présence.

Nous sommes heureux qu'il fait maintenant partie de notre communauté et nous savons le bien considérable qu'il nous apportera. Il sera pour de nombreuses années un outil de croissance qui nous permettra d'atteindre l'excellence en éducation. C'est l'aurore d'une nouvelle dimension.

SCHOOL TEACHERS

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): Speaker, in compliance with your ruling, I have removed the button that says "World Teachers' Day," but I want to bring to the government's attention the irony we see ourselves faced with. We have a debate going on in this Legislature on Bill 160 that, as a very major part of its thrust, is going to take away the basic protections teachers have; but more significantly than that, it's going to make it impossible for them to continue to carry on the kinds of responsibilities they have towards our young people in the school system. Yet we see an attempt by the government to say that they like teachers, that they are in favour of teachers, that their fight is not with teachers, while at the same time they are proceeding to put the teachers' backs up against the wall and forcing the strike that is impending.

We know that the fight our teachers are taking on has nothing to do with bettering their pocketbooks. It has everything to do with protecting the school system we have from the kind of ongoing attack this government seems to be intent on proceeding with. I want to say to the government that whether it's the 100 or so parents who were at the meeting at St Raymond school in my riding last night or the 200 people who were at a similar meeting a couple of weeks ago, parents and students understand what this fight is about. They are unanimously saying to the government that the attack you are taking on against our teachers and against our school system is wrong.

ORANGEVILLE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel): This is an exciting year for the Orangeville Agricultural Society. Labour Day weekend marked the 140th annual fall fair for the Orangeville Agricultural Society. After 140 years, this year's fair had the largest turnout of visitors ever. Most organizations would be happy to mark their 140th anniversary with a grand celebration. The Orangeville Agricultural Society decided to go one step further and has built one of the premier fairgrounds in Ontario.

In April 1997, the Orangeville Agricultural Society began building a new fairgrounds northeast of Orangeville in Mono township. This beautiful new complex overlooks Island Lake and has a facility that will serve our community well in the years to come. The years of planning and consultation have ensured a facility that not only serves the needs of the agricultural society but also the urban community, with the inclusion of a banquet and exhibition hall.

The first agricultural societies were designed to educate and enlighten the farming population. Educating urban residents has now become the focus of agricultural societies and fall fairs. The history of agricultural societies in Ontario is one that has always involved volunteers and people helping people.

The Orangeville Agricultural Society has not veered from these noble beginnings and has indeed become a focal point of our society. I'd like to congratulate the board of directors and members of the Orangeville Agricultural Society who have worked so hard over the past few years to bring this dream to reality.

1340

DEER AND MOOSE TAGS

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a message for the Minister of Natural Resources. At this time of year the phones in my office and across the province ring and the letters come pouring in. It's about the allocation of deer and moose tags in this province, and a minister who has done absolutely nothing about it.

I have a letter that is particularly instructive, Mr Minister. It's addressed to you. It says:

"I would really like to know how a person can go year after year, applying for a tag only to be let down by a system that does not work. I know this first hand....

"It has come to my attention after speaking to members of the Elliot Lake Rod and Gun Club, and also with Mr Ed Duff of the anglers and hunters association (Spanish branch) that I am not alone in feeling that this system has major problems and just is not working."

Later on he says, and I find this particularly appalling:

"After finding out I was unsuccessful for the fifth year in a row, I felt I deserved some kind of explanation. I contacted the Ministry of Natural Resources.... I explained my situation to the woman who answered the telephone and asked to speak to someone about this matter. I was informed that I was not allowed to speak with anyone, that she would e-mail my complaint to whomever, and if they felt there was any wrongdoing they would contact me. She said she didn't see anything that was wrong and told me not to expect an answer."

That's totally unacceptable. He goes on to say:

"As a respectful hunter, taxpayer, and a Canadian citizen...I would like to know, is the Ministry of Natural Resources not a government-operated system?"

The Minister of Natural Resources has been there for two and a half years. He has done nothing to correct this problem. He has a report on his desk. The minister needs to act on behalf of Ontario's hunters.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): Three months ago the board of health for the Porcupine health unit sent a letter to the Premier to express their serious concerns about the lack of 100% funding for a number of public health programs. Since the Premier has not taken the time to listen and to respond to their concerns, I want to read part of the letter.

"The board believes that the current plan to hand funding of all local public health programs to municipalities will place an unfair funding burden on certain health units and municipalities, most particularly in northern Ontario.

"Programs such as unorganized territories program, genetics program, speech-language pathology program and the mobile dental treatment program are at risk here since they have not been placed in the proposed mandatory program guidelines.

"These programs are unique and vital for northern Ontario, and as such, we are asking that measures be taken to ensure that vital programs provided by public health units will continue to be 100% provincially funded."

I am asking the Premier today to respond immediately to my constituents' concerns and to assure them, and all of us, that northern Ontario has access to funding of these services on the same basis as other residents throughout Ontario.

I might point out that I have a large number of letters here that have been sent to the Premier's office and to the Minster of Health and they haven't been responded to. I don't know if they intend to respond to them or not, but people in northern Ontario are very much concerned that when you dump all this funding on to municipalities, municipalities are going to have no choice but to either eliminate the services or raise taxes.

Taxes are high enough now without having to raise the property taxes to compensate for Mike Harris wanting to give a tax break to the wealthiest people throughout this province.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mrs Lillian Ross (Hamilton West): As members of this Legislature know, yesterday marked the fourth

celebration of the annual recognition by the United Nations of the International Day of Older Persons.

The maturing of nations around the world, including Canada, causes us to reflect on the changing priorities of society, the new challenges we will face in the years ahead, as well as the numerous opportunities presenting themselves.

In his book Boom, Bust and Echo, author David Foot notes the critical role seniors will play in both our economy and in the priorities of everyday life as they become an increasingly larger proportion of our cities, towns and communities.

Our government has recognized the important role seniors play in our society, with the Premier showing the vision to appoint a minister responsible for seniors' issues, the Honourable Cam Jackson, who has long been an advocate for seniors across Ontario.

The demand for strong and sustainable health care that will be there when our growing senior population needs it is a singular priority for our government, reflecting the growing importance of seniors in our province.

I know members of this House as well as friends and neighbours in my community of Hamilton join me in extending our very best wishes to all those who marked the International Day of Older Persons and wish them many years of success in the future.

RADIO STATION

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): Milestone Communications Ltd has appealed to the federal cabinet to overrule the decision of the CRTC awarding the 99.1 FM frequency to the CBC and not to Milestone for a world urban music station.

Milestone proposed that the CRTC grant them the frequency to serve Metro Toronto's young listener of world urban contemporary sound. The music would range from rhythm and blues, jazz, rap, hip hop and funk, calypso, Latin and reggae.

The new station would attract a mainstream, multicultural audience aged 18 to 34 who are now underserviced by the present selection of stations. With no station available to those listeners locally, many tune in to the weak signal that is available from Buffalo's world music station WBLK-FM.

Clearly the most diverse metropolitan city in Canada deserves its own station offering a Canadian perspective to black music. Although this Metro area boasts a black population of over 220,000, the station would serve listeners from all the communities around the greater Toronto area.

Our young black community needs a station to call their own. This is their city as much as it is anyone else's and they deserve a clear voice through a clear frequency to share their history, voice, music, culture with those from all other cultural backgrounds. They have a story to share and they need a Canadian radio station to articulate and express their message.

I have supported this bid since the beginning. I truly hope that with this appeal, Milestone will be granted the frequency for a new station on the airwaves for a new and vibrant voice in this diverse urban community.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): On Monday this government will release its fourth set of numbers on the cost of its download. Since no one but the Conservative caucus believes this will be revenue-neutral, it's time for the government to come clean on what it intends to do to assist municipalities facing huge property tax increases. Nowhere is this more necessary than in northern Ontario where the total download cost is now $282 million.

The Minister of Northern Development has clearly been told that the loss of the northern support grant makes the download much worse in the north. A review of the loss of all unconditional grants, including road subsidies, in northern Ontario shows a loss per household of $480.47 in the north versus a loss of $105.32 in the south. That's why the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities and the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association have called on this minister and this government to establish northern development investments to cope with our special needs in the face of the download.

The Minister of Northern Development knows the community reinvestment fund announced by the government is not specifically earmarked for the north. He knows FONOM, NOMA and the mayors of the five major northern centres do not accept this fund as an adequate response to our needs. He knows thousands of people in northern Ontario have petitioned him to keep the northern support grant so we won't be devastated by the download.

On Monday, we will see if the Minister of Northern Development will deliver. The north needs its own unique fund to cope with the impacts of the download. Anything less will not be acceptable.

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): I rise today in recognition of World Teachers' Day. It is an important day for us to look at because of the fact that we recognize teachers have such an important influence on all our children's lives.

While all of us can point to requirements, that is, academic requirements and federation membership, I think there are some real requirements. One of those is patience; patience for all students who come with a diverse set of needs. A second real requirement is a passion; a passion for excellence to stretch our students to become the best they can. Those are the kinds of qualities we see in those who teach our children today.

Today we recognize the importance of this influence and I would ask members to think for a moment on those teachers they remember, those teachers who had the kind of influence on them, who provided the inspiration and the motivation to become the people they could as well.

I want to pay special recognition, obviously as a teacher myself, to World Teachers' Day.

1350

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Time for oral questions, official opposition, member for Lawrence.

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): Mr Speaker, I don't see the Minister of Education in attendance and he was supposed to be here.

The Speaker: Do you want to stand it down?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Durham East, come to order. Member for Durham East, thank you for your assistance. Did you want to stand it down?

Mr Cordiano: We have a number of questions for the Minister of Education.

The Speaker: All right, then let's stand them both down and we'll go to the third party.

Interjection.

The Speaker: It's one or the other.

Mr Cordiano: Mr Speaker, question period starts more or less at the same time every day.

The Speaker: Look, member for Lawrence, I don't need any lectures on when question period starts. Do you want to stand it down or not?

Interjection.

The Speaker: Stand it down. Third party.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): We'll have to stand down our questions too, Speaker.

The Speaker: Question, member for Windsor-Walkerville. Can you restart the clock, please?

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The opposition is ready when question period starts. Unfortunately, the government isn't.

Minister, under subsection 257.12(1) of Bill 160, the Minister of Finance may make regulations for prescribing the tax rates for school purposes, but under subsection 257.12(4), the regulations under the above section "shall prescribe a single tax rate for the residential/farm property class and the multiresidential property class."

Given that across Ontario multiresidential apartment buildings are taxed at a rate which is two, four or, in some cases, six times as high as single-family homes, a fact which your parliamentary assistant frequently pointed out in debates on Bill 96, prescribing a single tax rate could mean a significant increase in taxes of homeowners and a significant decrease in the property tax on apartment buildings.

Can the minister tell the House today how much the education portion of the property taxes of homeowners will increase and apartments decrease because of provisions in Bill 160?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the member for the question. Obviously what this government is trying to do and will do is to bring some fairness and equity back into the property tax system.

If the member opposite thinks it's fair that tenants in Ontario pay up to six times as much in property tax as a single-family homeowner, I have to say I don't agree with that. I want to see some fairness and equity come into a very fractured assessment and tax system that we've had in Ontario for years. A property taxpayer, whether he lives in a rental accommodation or whether he lives in a single-family home or whether he lives in a condo, should be treated with the same fairness and equity as every other member of our society.

Mr Duncan: It's obvious the government doesn't know what the impact is. What we do know for sure is that tenants won't realize the benefit, it'll be landlords, because you provided weak amendments to a bill that doesn't protect tenants and you rejected our amendments, which would ensure that tenants realize the gain from decreases in property taxes.

Minister, the people of this province want to know how much homeowners' taxes will go up in Mississauga, in Kingston, in Windsor, and why you didn't provide reasonable guarantees that any decreases to property taxes for apartment buildings would flow through to tenants. You didn't do that. Why not? Will you now agree to revise Bill 96 and accept our proposition that will ensure that property taxes will go down for tenants and, at the same time, protect homeowners right across Ontario?

Hon Mr Leach: I thank the member for the question. I was actually going to get one of our backbenchers to ask that next week. What we want —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Minister.

Hon Mr Leach: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. You have to admit they are cute at that age though, aren't they?

As I said earlier, what we want to do is ensure that there is fairness in the tax system and what we're going to do with Bill 96 is ensure that fairness is there, that tax increases that come to a landlord will be able to be passed on to the tenant and tax decreases that are provided to a landlord will be passed through to the tenant. That's the type of fairness and equity this government is going to bring to the tax system, something that should have been done many years ago. The people of Ontario finally have a government that is prepared to deal with it.

The Speaker: New question, third question, third party.

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): We still have a dearth of cabinet ministers, but the government House leader is here and I'd like to ask him a question.

The Speaker: Okay, but right now, I'm just going to finish the third questions and then go back to the leaders' questions for both parties. So third question from the third party.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I have a question for the Minister of Education and Training. The minister will know that a group of parents delivered 400 letters to the government House leader this morning. These are all from parents who are concerned about Bill 160 and are uncertain about the future of education for their children. They know the bill gives the minister power to decide which classes will be taught by non-teachers, but they don't know which ones those will be. Also, they don't know how much money the government intends to spend on education because the funding formula is not spelled out and they're worried that the government may be going to take more money out of education for their children.

Will the minister, in response to these concerns of parents and the concerns of students who have been outside this place today demonstrating — and in Durham a number have walked out as well; North Bay as well — withdraw proceeding with Bill 160 until such time as he makes it clear how much money —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Minister of Education.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I'm very eager to respond to the member for Algoma. I'm pleased to inform him that I've checked with my colleagues on the mail they've been receiving and the phone calls they've been receiving in their constituency offices. I've talked to people in the ministry who are getting the response clips back from the information we've sent out to homes across the province. I can assure the member for Algoma that the vast majority of people, parents who are sending in this information to us, who are contacting our constituency offices, are saying: "Well done. Carry on. Go forward. Get a better education for our kids."

Mr Wildman: The parents who have presented the 400 letters this morning, the students who have walked out of classrooms, the teachers who have attended rallies across the province by the thousands are not happy with the way the minister and the government are proceeding. They are most concerned and worried that the government is pushing teachers to the brink. Parents don't want a strike, but they understand that the teachers are concerned about the quality of education for their children.

If the government is determined to proceed with Bill 160, as the minister seems to be, despite the concerns of parents, students, teachers and others interested in the quality of education, will he at least make a commitment that his government will provide for widespread hearings across the province in committee before this bill is passed into law so that these people will have the opportunity to express their concerns?

The Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Wildman: Will the minister at least make that commitment, that we're not going to just have three or four days of hurried hearings, that we're actually going to allow everyone who wants to make a presentation —

The Speaker: Thank you, member for Algoma.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I want to reassure the member for Algoma that we have certainly heard from parents and from taxpayers in the province who are concerned with the level of student performance, who want to make sure we can have a level of student performance that's the best in Canada — we think that's what our young people deserve — who are very interested in having our students have more time on tasks, the opportunity to have more time in their studies, the opportunity to not have the continuation in the growth in class sizes we saw through the social contract and other policies of your government. They're very pleased that is happening.

I can assure the member opposite that the government House leader will obviously, as this bill goes through the democratic process, provide opportunity for input from people on the bill, on the conditions of the bill. In addition to that, the member for Algoma can be assured by the fact that I will continue — even outside of that process — to look forward to working with people who are concerned about education, including the teachers, who, I understand, will be looking forward to a meeting in the near future.

1400

The Speaker: New question; member for Lawrence.

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): I have a question for the Minister of Education. You have been, for months, desperately trying to make people believe that your education reforms are not motivated by the bottom-line objectives you have. You want people to believe that somehow you're making these reforms and you're not taking hundreds of millions of dollars out of the education system, which in fact you've already done. If that wasn't enough, now you have an even bigger problem. You have another $1 billion in cuts to camouflage. How can you expect anyone to believe you when you say you're trying to put the interests of students first? Will you now stand up and tell the truth about your additional plans to take another $1 billion out of education?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The Premier spoke on this earlier this week and made it very clear to everyone in this chamber — you might not have been listening — that we have no such plans. We do have a plan, though, to make sure our students have the best performance in Canada. We think that's what we owe the students of Ontario. We have a commitment to doing that at the best possible cost. If you have an objection to either one of those objectives, please say what it is.

Mr Cordiano: Very clearly, let me tell you exactly what you've done. Over a year ago, you contracted with Strategic Counsel Inc. They knew exactly what you were up to, what you really wanted to do to the education system. You asked them to test how you could get away with getting rid of 10,000 teachers. They conducted focus groups and polls and they told you it would be "very problematic" to fire 10,000 teachers in the province of Ontario and get away with it. I'm going to ask you again: Are you going to stand in your place today and deny that you had plans to fire 10,000 teachers and take an additional $1 billion out of the education system? Will you stand up and deny that today?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The intentions of this government are well known, because the intentions of our government have been put forward in proposed legislation in this chamber. Our intentions are very simple. Our intentions are to have the province be responsible for the funding of education so that every student in the province can have access to a high quality of education. Our intention is to make sure we reduce the amount of money that we're spending on bureaucracies and on governance for education. To make sure our funds are spent on issues that matter to students is another one of our intentions.

Our overriding intention is to provide a better quality of education for our students by capping the growth in class size, by making sure they have more time on tasks in the classroom, in their studies, so they can have the advantages students in other provinces have. I think that's honourable. I don't understand why you would have objection to any of that.

Mr Cordiano: The minister's plan all along was to get rid of 10,000 teachers. Strategic Counsel told you that you wouldn't get away with doing it directly, so what do you do? You try to do it indirectly. You've started a propaganda war against teachers. You attack teachers and you create a whole bunch of phoney issues to undermine teachers' credibility. All the while you say to them: "Tone down your rhetoric. Come and deal with us in good faith." How can they do that when you've shown no faith whatsoever in teachers?

The fact is that you've had a hidden agenda all along to get rid of 10,000 teachers and to pull another $1 billion out of the education system. I want to ask you again, Minister, to stand in your place today and tell us that you have no plans to fire 10,000 teachers and take an additional $1 billion out of the education system. Stand up and deny that.

Hon Mr Snobelen: First of all, I take exception when the member opposite stands in his place and says what is simply not based in fact, and that is some reference to me attacking teachers. I have never done that. I have stood in this chamber and on platforms across the province and said our education has the most highly qualified, highly respected people of any system I know of. I'll say that again today. Our teachers are the best-qualified of anyone in Canada, and we must give them the system they need to make sure our students' performance is the best in Canada.

I've said time and again that the teachers are the core of education and the core of a new education system in Ontario, a better education system in Ontario, an education system intended to deliver the results our students need. That's the case, that's the record, and it's been the record for the last two years and more months.

I can say that if a phoney issue for you is the fact that our students are stuck in mediocre test results, that's not a phoney issue for me or for this government.

The Speaker: New question; member for Fort William.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): My question is to the Minister of Education. In January 1997, the headline in the Ottawa Citizen was, "Government Works on Plan to Drop 10,000 Teachers." Today we are debating Bill 160. This minister has been setting the stage for this fight with teachers from the time he came in with his plan to create a crisis in education.

Minister, you want your $1 billion and you need control of all the tools to let you make those cuts, and that, pure and simple, is what Bill 160 is all about.

This week your Premier has said in the most provocative way that you can't trust teachers and trustees to provide a quality education. Believe it or not, you and the Premier have been trying to lay the blame for larger class sizes on teachers, and that is a direct attack on teachers. You want to say: "Give us the power. Trust us." Minister, you know that larger class sizes are the result of the cuts you have already made, and once again you are deliberately trying to pick a fight with teachers to get the power you want and hide your cuts from the public.

Will you drop this public relations campaign against teachers? Will you stop trying to pick this fight?

Hon Mr Snobelen: To the member opposite, I must say that I think I made the record very clear in the speech I made introducing second reading of this particular piece of legislation. It's on record that our goal here is to improve quality in education for our young people. We measure quality by our students' performance. That's what we believe is the senior measure of quality in our system. All the things contained in this legislation are designed to do just that.

If the member opposite, by virtue of saying "control" or these other words, is suggesting that the provincial government, this government, believes that someone should be accountable, someone should be representing the interests of students, someone should be making sure that class sizes don't grow, someone should be making sure that students have more time on tasks, more time to study, more time to compete with their counterparts across Canada, then yes indeed, that is our goal. Our goal most definitely is to make sure we can control those quality issues for our students.

Mrs McLeod: Minister, you are trying to pick a fight and you are trying to create an impression that is simply not based on fact. You are trying to create the impression that large class sizes are the results of teachers looking for pay increases.

I point to the evidence of the record of this week alone. Your Premier said that the Lakehead Board of Education negotiated an increase in class size to give a pay raise to teachers. It is a fact that teachers in the elementary and secondary schools of the Lakehead Board of Education have had no increase in salary for five years and no increase in benefits for five years. There was an increase in class size of one student in grades 3 to 8, and it was there for one reason. That was to save junior kindergarten from your $145 million in cuts.

Yesterday the Premier accused the Lakehead separate board of negotiating an increase in class size. There was a small increase in the elementary class size. It was the only way they could fix the unfairness to young teachers that

was created when you cemented the cuts that the NDP had made through the social contract.

The Speaker: Question, please.

Mrs McLeod: The Premier has said you aren't interested in why, and we know why you're not interested in knowing why the class sizes went up, because they were the result of your cuts. Again I ask, will you stop the war on teachers —

The Speaker: Thank you.

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Hon Mr Snobelen: The member for Fort William has been in this chamber for some time and understands what it means to have a grid and what it means when people go through a salary grid, understands all those things, although you wouldn't find that in the question. The point she's missing is this: that regardless of who took what stance at a bargaining table, regardless of who argued what position, the result of bargaining year in and year out in the province, for a long period of time, going back to perhaps before the social contract, has been that class sizes have been growing and property taxes have been going way up beyond inflation.

This bill will allow the province to take responsibility for funding education, which any number of outside reports have suggested provincial governments do, when you were in power and when they were in power. We've done that. We've also now in this bill sought to cap the growth in class sizes and cap the growth in property taxes. Surely, having the ability to make sure class sizes don't grow is a good thing.

Mrs McLeod: I do understand what $1 billion in cuts has already done to public education; I certainly understand what $1 billion more in cuts will do to public education; and I understand completely how you are trying to justify your power grab to make that $1 billion in cuts by falsely accusing teachers and trustees of being untrustworthy. Yet despite all the provocation you have given them, despite all your attacks on teachers, teachers are prepared to sit down once again and try to avoid the confrontation that none of us wants to see ahead.

Minister, if these talks are going to have any hope at all of success, you have to stop your public war and you have to step back from your ultimatums. You are still today setting down bottom lines of what is non-negotiable. You still want all the control. You want that for one reason, and the teachers know it: You want the power to make the cuts you need.

Your bottom line is still to get your hands on the levers that will give you $1 billion, and your bottom line will still mean the loss of as many as 10,000 teachers that you were looking for last January. Will you drop the ultimatums, withdraw Bill 160 and sit down and have real discussions with teachers so we can avoid the confrontation ahead?

Hon Mr Snobelen: To be clear once again to the member for Fort William, this government has no intention, no plan to withdraw $1 billion. It has a plan to change the funding system from a system that treated some students in Ontario as second-class students to a funding system that's not predicated on property values but predicated on identified need of students. We most certainly have that intention. We're working very hard at developing that. I'm sure it will be a dramatic improvement for students in schools in Ontario.

We have no intention whatsoever to step back from representing the interests of students, representing the intention of making sure that Ontario's students have the highest performance of any jurisdiction in Canada. We will not step one foot back from that position.

HOME CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): In the absence of the Minister of Health, I have a question for the government House leader. Today I sent a letter to the Minister of Health, asking him to meet with me and our health critic to discuss the problems with the Red Cross homemakers' service.

This is a service that provides home care in 45 communities across Ontario. The Red Cross itself says the problem that has resulted comes from your $500-million cut to pay equity. Regardless, this is a vital health care service, one that literally thousands of people depend upon.

I want to ask you, what is your government's response to our invitation? Is the Minister of Health willing to meet with myself and our health critic, the Red Cross representative and the homemakers' representative? Will you do that?

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I'll refer this matter to the Minister of Labour.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Labour): As I indicated yesterday, we were quite prepared to meet with all three parties and we would be quite anxious to see if there is a resolution to the problem. But I would just indicate to you that this morning when Mr Prowse was on CFRB, he indicated that he hoped it was up to the three leaders of the parties to come together and set politics aside to address the problem. Certainly that's what we would like to do as well.

Mr Hampton: I asked the question of the government House leader because I assume that he is the acting Premier of the day, since I gather the Minister of Health doesn't answer any of these questions any more.

The Minister of Health suddenly comes into the Legislature yesterday — and this is a problem that has been around for over a year; it's a problem the Minister of Health has known about for over a year — and tries to blame everyone else for a problem that he's known about for a year. I ask the minister for a commitment that the Minister of Health would come and discuss this, because this is not a labour issue; this is a health issue. Some 73,000 across this province depend upon this service, yet we haven't seen the Minister of Health.

I'm going to ask you again: Will you guarantee that the Minister of Health, the person responsible for health care in Ontario, will come and deal with this very important health care issue?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just remind you again that this problem arose from the 1988 pay equity legislation, which unfortunately did cover the Red Cross. They were the only homemaking organization to have 500 and more employees. Unfortunately the deadline for compliance is January 1, 1998, so they have been caught in a bind because of the pay equity legislation of 1988.

Mr Hampton: I again ask for a commitment that the Minister of Health would come and try to help us find a solution to this health care problem. It's clear that the Minister of Labour continues to want to find someone to blame, so I'll take her up. Minister, there was no problem until you cut pay equity. Until your government went after the lowest-paid women in this province, there was no problem. That's where the problem results.

I too can quote the Red Cross submission. They say, "There is an overall reduction in the availability and desirability of institutional care while financial constraints are imposed and will continue in the homemaker service providers." In other words, you're cutting hospital care and you're also applying constraint to homemakers. That's what's created the problem. You've got a Minister of Health who wants to cut services in hospitals and then he wants to do homemaking care on the cheap.

I ask you again: Will the Minister of Health meet with us to find a solution to this health care problem, instead of your government looking for someone to blame all the time?

Hon Mrs Witmer: As I indicated in my first answer, the government is quite prepared to meet with the other two parties on this issue, but I think you need to be very clear that this is a problem that was created by the 1988 Pay Equity Act and what you're now —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Minister.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would have to say I'm a little surprised, because last week you were asking us to uphold the principles of pay equity and this week you seem to be asking for us to make exceptions to the legislation.

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FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. In continuing questions to you on the need for a public inquiry into Hamilton, you responded to me on September 18 by saying, "I would remind the member that under the Municipal Act and the regional municipality act, the municipality can hold an inquiry into matters relating to their own firefighters and those matters." You said the same thing to me yesterday. What I want to know is, do you stand by those statements today?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): I stand by them, as advised by my legal counsel.

Mr Christopherson: And so the waffling begins. The fact of the matter is, Minister, that the law in the Municipal Act, which you say says our municipal council can hold a public inquiry, no longer exists. Do you know why? Because 10 months ago, under your Bill 86, you eliminated it. It's no longer there under the act. Therefore, if you don't even know the law, how can anybody in Hamilton have faith you could possibly understand the health interests in our community?

Hon Mr Sterling: Before looking into that possibility, I asked legal counsel in my ministry. They assured me that both the region and the municipality have the right to hold an inquiry.

Mr Christopherson: I'm advising the minister that that's just not the case; not that that was sufficient anyway, but it's not the case. But it's interesting that you say you're going on the advice of your officials because it's that same advice that has you standing in your place every day saying we don't need a public inquiry, yet I can list for you a litany of groups and organizations that have experience and expertise, including the citizens, I might add, who say that a public inquiry is needed.

In light of the fact that the same officials that gave you that bad advice are giving you the bad advice around the public inquiry, will you now stand in your place and admit you're wrong and acknowledge that the people in my community deserve a public inquiry and you have an obligation to call it here today?

Hon Mr Sterling: I'd be pleased to provide the member with the legal advice as to why the municipality can hold an inquiry and why the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth can also —

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): You know what Shakespeare said about the lawyers. Shakespeare was right.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Minister.

Hon Mr Sterling: I'm sorry, but the member is wrong.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, as you're aware, municipal elections are just around the corner and many individuals in my riding are running. They're new individuals, they've never run before and I'm sure that this applies all across Ontario. They have many questions about the process and procedures to follow. I remember when I ran 20 years ago, I had these same questions. I remember the difficulty. I was a mere child then, I realize.

It can become quite difficult to keep track of all the forms. Candidates are very concerned that they don't breach any guidelines. Do you have any printed information or does the ministry have any printed information available to help campaigners and their campaign teams with the rules surrounding the election?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'd like to thank the member for Kitchener for that very good and timely question. This is a question that all members of the House should be interested in as we

draw closer to the November 10 election. The deadline for filing nomination papers is only eight days away, on October 10, and the serious campaign is going to be starting right across the province.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has put together a general guide for candidates in the 1997 municipal elections, which is available to them in both English and French. The guide contains information on such things as financial reporting and disclosure, campaign expenses and key election dates. The information in this guide is very good for new candidates and I would urge any candidate to get it, but obviously it is only a guide and they should refer to the Municipal Elections Act for precise information.

Mr Wettlaufer: I'm sorry, Minister, I didn't hear everything you said because of so much noise over here. I wonder if you could tell us how the candidates could get a copy of the guide that you're talking about.

Hon Mr Leach: I'll repeat what I said for the member if he didn't hear it the first time. Copies of this guide can be obtained through conventional means by applying to the local municipal clerk, or an individual can contact the regional offices of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to obtain a copy. This candidates' guide is also posted on the local government section of our Web site for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, which can be reached on the Internet at www.mmah.dob.on.ca. Wow.

In addition, I have asked the staff in my office to make sure —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order, dot. I'll break the news to you, member for Ottawa West. Heckling is out of order. It is. You're not supposed to heckle.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The member for Essex South says the Speaker should know that and I do. Minister.

Hon Mr Leach: I want to make sure that everybody has this information. We will be providing copies of this very informative document to every member of the Legislature next week.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. This is in regard to Bill 142, workfare. We had a wonderful deputation by Mae Harman, who was born in 1920. She spoke to us at our committee, very concerned with the clause that includes 60- to 64-year-olds in workfare. This is one question that Mae Harman would like you to answer:

"Some of these are people who are illiterate because appropriate schooling was not available in their younger years or lacking in skills needed in today's work market. A lot of these people who are women who have never worked outside the home. In a society where 17% to 18% of youth are unemployed, why would we spend resources on putting old people back to work?"

Minister, could you explain to Mae Harman why you would bring in workfare, what you call career retraining, for 60- to 64-year-olds?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): With all due respect to the honourable member, I am a little surprised that she would ask that question. I think that whether you're 21 years of age and have difficulties, whether it's literacy or language or lack of experience, or whether you're 61 years of age, most individuals don't want to be on welfare. They would very much like to be in paid employment. I think that whether you're 21 years old or 61 years old, you are worth the investment to help you get where you want to be and that's not to stay on welfare.

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Mrs Pupatello: I'm very surprised by that response, that 60- to 64-year-olds should be in career retraining. It's just not even reasonable.

I have a gentleman in the gallery today whose name is Hugh. He drove in from Oakville. This gentleman is 50 years old. He is on welfare and collecting assistance. He was downsized in 1990. This individual is very typical of the kind of people who are on your welfare rolls. He has had several contract positions since 1990, but after 3,000 résumés, personally calling 1,250 corporations, desperately looking for work, he is unfortunately still on welfare.

He expected, and through his local Tory MPP was somehow told, that this workfare was going to work for him. Minister, I'm going to send you a copy of his résumé. He is here in the House today, and he would like to speak with you in the hallway outside after question period. Will you please tell us how workfare is going to work for Hugh when nothing so far has, according to your program?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I'd be very pleased to meet this gentleman. I'm met many individuals who are on welfare. One of the things they've told me is that they don't want to be there. What is the honourable member suggesting, that we should give up on this person? Is she suggesting that just because this individual or other individuals are 60, 61, 62, that we should just say, "Sorry, they're over the hill; let them sit there on welfare"? Is that what she's suggesting? I think we owe those individuals a heck of a lot more. They want help, they need help, we owe them that opportunity. I am surprised that she would say that just because someone is over 60 we should let them sit there.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Windsor-Sandwich, that's out of order. Put it down, please.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Today a committee is doing clause-by-clause on Bill 148, the City of Toronto Act. This afternoon we will be dealing with the member

for Beaches-Woodbine's amendments to increase the number of East York councillors from two to three, on a transitional basis.

Your parliamentary assistant said on August 26 in the House that it was too late to make changes because it would not be fair to the candidates running. Days later I sent over to you a declaration signed by every one of the candidates saying it was not a problem and urging you to do this. I met with members for Team East York, some of whom are here today, I've been knocking on doors in East York, and I can tell you that the issue I hear time after time is that they want the number increased. This is from people, residents, of all political stripes. I'm asking you today, will you agree to allow the government members of the committee to vote in favour of the member for Beaches-Woodbine's amendment?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): To the member for Riverdale, I certainly would not want to interfere with the workings of a committee of this Legislature. The committee is there to listen to the arguments put forth on amendments both by the opposition parties and by ourselves, and that committee will make the decision on which amendments are appropriate, which amendments are in order and which amendments should be accepted and which should be rejected. That's a job for the committee. They're appointed for that purpose. I know they will make the right decision.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Supplementary.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): I'm going to take that as an indication that the minister and the parliamentary assistant are not going to put a whip on the committee; in other words, that the committee members will be able to vote their own mind. The minister knows well that's not normally how committee business is done.

I know your main concern was whether there was general support outside of East York for this as well. I want to tell you that in response to the parliamentary assistant, I have spoken to both of the lead mayoralty candidates, and they are both in favour of this; I have spoken to councillor candidates in the wards around the ward of East York, and none of them has a problem with this. I have also spoken to the transition team, because I know that was of particular concern to you. Alan Tonks, the chair of the transition team, has said he has absolutely no problem with this amendment going forward to provide the third councillor for East York on a transitional basis for the first term of the council.

Minister, I would hope you could do a little bit more than just release the whip on the backbenchers on your committee. I hope you would indicate that it is an important issue and that you yourself support trying to address this issue for the citizens of East York.

Hon Mr Leach: Again, I wouldn't presume to interfere with the workings of a committee of this Legislature. I can also say, as I've said to the member in the past, that I believe it's the decision of the newly elected council to make that decision. They should decide on how community councils work, whether they should be changed in any shape or form, the size, the number, what the responsibilities are. They're going to be the duly elected members of the new unified city of Toronto council, and they should make that decision. However, having said that, I haven't read the amendment that has been put forward by the member opposite, but if it will be given to the committee, I'm quite sure the committee will make an appropriate decision.

The Speaker: New question; member for York East.

Mr John L. Parker (York East): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Ms Lankin: No, John. Come on, ask about the councillors.

Mr Parker: I will be speaking on the subject of the third member from East York in committee this afternoon, and I look forward to seeing you there, but that's not what my question is about right here. The fact is that I support the motion for a third member for East York, but that's not what I'm rising to ask about right now.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr John L. Parker (York East): To the Minister of Community and Social Services: I have been participating in committee hearings on Bill 142, the Social Assistance Reform Act, and I was concerned to see in the newspaper today that there are some allegations that the appeals process you are suggesting might weaken the overall right of appeal. Minister, I invite you to tell this House whether this allegation is true.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): I'd be very pleased to do so, because I know that's a question that has been asked. First of all, the right to appeal is continuing for both those who are on the new Ontario disability support plan and those who would be on Ontario Works. That is certainly because we believe that's an important legal right and it is still in this legislation; we've been very clear about that. We do know that one of the difficulties has been that because that process is a sort of semijudicial process, it can take a great deal of time for a recipient to go through it. We have added an additional step, an internal review process that will be available to them that hopefully can resolve the issue much more quickly.

I'd also like to mention that people say they're concerned that in the new legislation people can't appeal discretionary or emergency benefits. That's quite true, but that is a carryover from the legislation as it existed, as I understand, under previous governments, so we haven't changed that.

Mr Parker: Thank you, Minister, for that explanation. You speak of a need to streamline the current system, and I wonder if you might just tell the House what the current system looks like and why it needs to be streamlined.

Hon Mrs Ecker: I would be very pleased to do that. One of the difficulties is that it can take seven months or longer for an individual to go through the process. One of the other things we have found out is that the semijudicial process, if you will, is sometimes very inappropriate to solve what are frequently communications issues or may

well be things that a recipient can easily resolve with a case worker who hasn't been involved in the case before. The other thing is that 22% of the cases that are there now are not able to proceed because clients are not able to show up and don't show up. I think it is fair to take a look at this process and ask how we can make it work better for those individuals who need an appeal mechanism to resolve their differences.

1440

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Education. About two years ago, you suggested that you wanted to create a crisis in education. Let me tell you, Minister, you've succeeded. You have created this crisis in education. Your cuts are hurting kids across the province.

Let me give you the example of one of my constituents, five-year-old Caitlin Vanderbeek. This five-year-old girl, because of your cuts, has been forced to attend three different schools in two years. She has a school two blocks away from her home. It was overcrowded. The classroom could not be split. She was sent to another school 14 blocks away from her home.

This is a four-year-old. This year again she tried to return to her school two blocks away. She could not. She was sent to a school even farther. This is a girl who is now five years old and in one year has attended three different schools because of your cuts.

You said earlier that parents are complimenting you. Let me tell you what the Vanderbeeks have said to me in a letter:

"I blame this situation on...the constant budget cuts. The bottom line of this equation is quite simply the scarred emotions of my little girl."

These are the parents of a five-year-old you have hurt by your cuts, Minister. Will you today —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you. Minister?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): First, let me say to the member opposite that it might be useful for you to have a look at what has happened in terms of funding in education over the course of the last two years. I believe if you do the investigation you will find that the actual amount of funds, the actual spending in education, has gone up over the course of the last two years. You'll also find that the enrolment has gone down. That's what you'll find if you investigate what's happened in terms of spending in education.

As far as the choices that are made and the effect they have on students, I agree with you that there have been some bad choices made in the past. That's one of the reasons we are moving very quickly, as quickly as we can, to get a better governance structure in place, to get a more accountable system of education in place in Ontario, more accountable to parents and more accountable to students like the one you use as an example today. I believe that's a case for reforming and changing and improving our education system.

Mr Agostino: Minister, you asked about the cuts. Through an order paper question, your own ministry acknowledged that you, as minister, over the last two years have cut $19.4 million out of the educational system in the Hamilton-Wentworth area. Your order paper question, your ministry: $19.4 million.

We have a school, R.A. Riddell, 600 students — no librarian; Fairfield and Lloyd George elementary schools — library services, music, gym, learning resources have been cut. Minister, how many more examples do you need? Students understand what is happening. As of this morning, we have had five high schools in Hamilton where the students have walked out in protest to your cuts and what you're doing to education.

Minister, you can talk all you want about what you're doing in reform, but how do you explain to this four-year-old girl why she can't attend a school with her friends two blocks away because you have cut $19.4 million out of the educational system? If you will not admit that the cuts have hurt the kids, will you today guarantee that this little girl will be able to go back to her school two blocks away on Monday morning?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I think the member opposite knows that those sorts of decisions are made at the board level; I know that he does know that, so I think the question is somewhat disingenuous.

But I will address the underlying issue, and that is this: Yes, we asked school boards to make some reductions. We targeted those. We believe there is too much being spent in administration, too much being spent in governance in education, not enough getting through to those critical areas that are important to our young people. Yes, we asked for that.

The net result was an increase in property taxes. Rather than cut the cost of administration, rather than cut what is by anyone's description a bloated bureaucracy, people chose instead to increase property taxes. I think if the member opposite does his homework and checks, he will find out the net effect has been more spending in education.

But that's not the point. The point is, how do we control the growth in class size? How do we make sure our students have better a curriculum? How do we make sure our students have more time on task? The answer is in the legislation before the House.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development. I am happy he is sitting beside the Minister of Municipal Affairs because it's a related question. It has to do with a small community in my constituency by the name of Chapleau, with a population of about 2,900.

The people in Chapleau heard the Premier's pinkie-swear promise that after all the downloading takes place, it would be revenue-neutral for the people in Chapleau. Will the Minister of Northern Development today assure

me and the people in Chapleau that that pinkie-swear promise of the Premier's will be honoured for them?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Minister of Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines): I agree with the member of the third party that Chapleau is a beautiful part of Ontario and it's got some fine people. I just want to thank him for the question and thank the people of Chapleau for all their encouraging advice to the government.

The Premier mentioned that the Who Does What exercise with the community reinvestment is fiscally neutral. The people of Chapleau have worked through FONOM and NOMA and Minister Leach and I met at the AMO conference with FONOM and NOMA and six mayors from cities in northern Ontario. We had a very positive discussion where they presented a proposal that recognized they have to find some savings, and they just want to be treated fairly with the rest of Ontario. That's all I can report at this time.

Mr Laughren: I'm not sure what I heard, but let me tell the Minister of Northern Development what's happening in Chapleau. The net downloading, the net after everything is netted out, is 175% of their revenue base. Now, you and I know that's an impossible situation. Anything they've heard from you folks about assistance comes to about 7% of the problem.

You know that's untenable. I want you to tell the people in Chapleau and me why they should not simply mail the keys to that town to you or to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon Mr Hodgson: I appreciate the question. Municipal affairs and my ministry have working teams that can go out and talk to the clerk and the politicians of Chapleau. I know they've heard a lot of fearmongering about property tax increases.

I can just tell you that in general the Mike Harris government is against property tax hikes. We're trying to lower income taxes and payroll taxes for working people in the province. We're not going to transfer that on to household taxes. We're trying to have a fair model which allows municipalities to meet the challenge of becoming more efficient, more effective and more accountable to local representatives.

In the northern development ministry, we've had meetings with municipal leaders right across northern Ontario on ways they can deliver services that are designed in the north, for the north and will work in the north.

SPORTS FUNDING

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Centre): My question today is to my honourable colleague from Scarborough, the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

As the minister is well aware, Scarborough is home to many athletes and many athletic teams from recreational and house league to competitive and rep. In fact, just yesterday I had the pleasure of speaking with one of my constituents about her 12-year-old daughter, who is a very accomplished gymnast. I am pleased to say I was able to assist her in receiving sponsorship from a private company in order to help pursue her dream of competing in the Olympics one day.

This week marks the first anniversary of the minister's announcement on a new sports strategy for Ontario. Since that time, the provincial sports organizations which continue to receive provincial government funding have been working with the minister to finalize their allocations for this fiscal year.

Would the minister please explain for everyone interested in sport in Ontario, and especially my riding of Scarborough Centre, how the application process is going and the rationale for the government's decision to change its strategy for sport in this province.

Hon Marilyn Mushinski (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation): I would like to thank the member for Scarborough Centre for the question. As he knows, last year on October 4 I announced for the first time a real strategy for the government's interest in sport. Previous governments had no strategy and this led to the taxpayer paying for snooker and solo swim and fly-and-bait casting and baton-twirling, among other things.

Our strategy is designed to support athletic development from novice to national levels. If a PSO participates in the Ontario, Canada or Olympic games, they are eligible for support. We will only fund activities which serve the provincial interest. These include coaching and athletic development, sports safety and initiatives.

Mr Newman: I appreciate the minister's response. As I mentioned in my earlier question, amateur sport in Scarborough is flourishing. As the member for Scarborough Centre, I am always pleased to lend my support to these worthwhile programs. I, like many other individuals and businesses in Scarborough, am the sponsor of hockey teams, soccer teams and baseball teams. During my contact with these organizations, parents, players, coaches and organizers have shared with me their comments on our government's strategy.

Would the minister please share with this House some of the comments she has received on the new strategy and respond to some of the criticism that has been reported on the delivery of support to eligible provincial sport organizations?

Hon Ms Mushinski: Again, I'd like to thank my colleague from Scarborough Centre for the question. First of all, I'm not about to apologize for asking PSOs to explain how they spend taxpayers' dollars. PSOs which do not provide a plan for how they are going to spend taxpayers' dollars won't get taxpayers' dollars.

It's really too bad that the Liberals don't agree with that philosophy. They are already advocating a return to the old free-spending ways of the last decade. Both my critic and the member for Fort William have recently written to my office advocating the funding of 10-pin bowling. I hope they are ready to defend that decision with their constituents.

Dan Kozak, the president of the Ontario Speed Skating Association, said this of our new strategy: "The govern-

ment's new approach to sport funding will have a positive effect in the long-term development of sport in Ontario. It will make the provincial" —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

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PETITIONS

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Windsor-Essex county was the first community to undergo hospital restructuring; and

"Whereas the community supported the recommendations of the Win-Win report based on a funding model that included the expansion of community-based care; and

"Whereas recent reports estimate that Windsor-Essex hospital expenditure is underfunded by approximately $122 per person; and

"Whereas this represents the lowest funding per capita for hospital services of any community in Ontario with a population of over 200,000;

"Whereas hospitals across the province have been forced to further reduce expenditures by 18%; and

"Whereas these cuts have forced hospitals to eliminate emergency services in the west end of Windsor and other desperately needed services; and

"Whereas the minister acknowledged that additional funding was necessary in high-growth areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister of Health to provide the appropriate level of funding to hospitals in Windsor-Essex which would allow Windsor Regional Hospital to provide urgent care services for the west-end community and to restore equitable health care funding across Windsor and Essex county."

I join thousands of my fellow citizens in signing this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition regarding the call by Hamiltonians for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry into the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

I continue to support and join my constituents in this demand.

TRAFFIC CONTROL

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I have a petition submitted to me by a constituent, Margaret Baker, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the volume of traffic travelling along the Queensway between Highway 416 and Moodie Drive has grown steadily in recent years due to population and industrial growth of Kanata, the addition of a third lane to Moodie Drive, the recent expansions of both Nortel and Newbridge, the evolution of the Corel Centre into the home of the Ottawa Senators and Ottawa's premier entertainment arena, and the opening of Highway 416 as a primary route connecting Ottawa to Highway 401; and

"Whereas this increased volume of traffic is producing levels of noise which are disturbing local residents both during the day and the night;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue to develop the roadways along this section of the Queensway in order to accommodate the increased volumes of traffic, but to couple this development with measures, including the extension of a berm along the north side of the Queensway in the Crystal Beach area to mitigate the negative aspects caused by this traffic."

I've affixed my own signature thereto, because I am in complete agreement.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and concerns Bill 160.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's educational system; and

"Whereas you cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather

than imposing his solution, which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature to this petition.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas workers' health and safety must be protected in the province of Ontario, especially the right to refuse work which is likely to endanger a worker, the right to know about workplace hazards and the right to participate in joint health and safety committees; and

"Whereas the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations help protect workers' health and safety and workers' rights in this area; and

"Whereas the government's discussion paper Review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act threatens workers' health and safety by proposing to deregulate the existing act and regulations to reduce or eliminate workers' health and safety rights and to reduce enforcement of health and safety laws by the Ministry of Labour; and

"Whereas workers must have a full opportunity to be heard about this proposed drastic erosion in their present protections from injuries and occupational diseases;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose any attempt to erode the present provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations. Further we, the undersigned, demand that public hearings on the discussion paper be held in at least 20 communities throughout Ontario."

I would remind the government, not like the six crummy days they offered on Bill 99 but 20 proper days of hearings across Ontario, and I add my name to theirs.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 69 people.

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass a bill empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

HEALTH CARE

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): I have a petition signed by over 150 petitioners and it comes from the Alliance of Seniors to Protect Canada's Social Programs.

"Whereas a not-for-profit, affordable and accessible continuum of quality health care has been has been a long-standing and world-renowned tradition for Canadians; and

"Whereas more not less not-for-profit, accessible health care both in the home and in institutions is required by the aging and increasing poor populations; and

"Whereas hospital facilities are being closed resulting in inadequate acute care beds, inadequate chronic care beds and inadequate access to emergency care; and

"Whereas many patients are leaving hospitals quicker and sicker; and

"Whereas not-for-profit health care services are now threatened by government cutbacks which encourage the emergence of private, for-profit supplementary health care insurance companies and for-profit service providers; and

"Whereas the new system of community care initiated by this provincial government devastates the quality of our health care by lowering wages and benefits of health care workers, lowering qualifications for nursing and health care workers, lowering the ratios of health care workers to patients;

"Now, therefore, be it resolved that this forum of the alliance of seniors representing over 500,000 seniors in Ontario demand that the Ontario provincial government preserve a universally accessible not-for-profit system of health care, maintain the highest standards of quality care which have been the hallmark of our society and undertake whatever actions are required consistent with the not-for-profit sector remaining the cornerstone for the provision of health care in Canada.

"Honour the five principles of the Canada Health Act;

"Be it further resolved that copies of this resolution be forwarded to the Right Honourable Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and to Premier Mike Harris."

I concur with the petition and I will affix my signature to it.

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SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): I have a petition which reads as follows:

"The Ontario Works Act will change social assistance from a system based on entitlement and need to one based on bureaucratic convenience and stripping citizens of their basic rights. It will fundamentally change the treatment of single mothers and their children in the social assistance system, not just in work requirements but also with respect to assets, information requirements and penalties. It paves the way for the government of Ontario to get out of the social assistance business and sets the stage for privatization of welfare. There is no requirement that a private delivery agent be a not-for-profit organization.

"We need to demand full and public hearings before an act which revolutionizes the very nature of social assistance in Ontario is passed. This is imperative even though there have been many consultations on social assistance over the last 10 years. None of these consultations recommended anything like the Ontario Works Act. The democratic process at least requires informed and open debate. In order to be informed, people need to know what the regulations will be.

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand (1) all the rules on how the welfare system will run and who will be eligible are to be incorporated into the act before it receives assent in the Legislature; and (2) the right to have the most important issues to be decided with public notice and public debate."

This is signed by 67 residents of the city of Sudbury and I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to it.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by eight people.

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass a bill empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

TUITION FEES

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Conservative government has cut funding to St Clair College; and

"Whereas these funding cuts have caused hardship on senior citizens by increasing the costs for their programs by more than 400%;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all college programs, be they educational or recreation, remain affordable and accessible to senior citizens."

I join with hundreds of my fellow Windsorites in signing this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition and it reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, request the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy and Environment Canada jointly: (1) to conduct a full-scale public inquiry into the Hamilton Plastimet fire to determine the complete nature and extent of the pollution it has caused, the health effects on firefighters and others attending the fire, as well as residents in Hamilton and farther afield; and (2) to ensure safe, speedy and complete cleanup of the fire site, plus residential and all other areas where chemicals from the fire have fallen out."

I add my name to theirs.

RENT REGULATION

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to take away the protections of the Rent Control Act;

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to allow a landlord to charge a tenant who moves into an apartment whatever the landlord can get away with;

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to raise the limit of how high rents can increase for all tenants;

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to make it easier to demolish or convert existing affordable rental housing; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to take away the rent freeze which has been successful in forcing some landlords to repair their buildings;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to keep the existing rent laws which provide true protection for tenants in place."

I affix my signature to this petition.

STANDING ORDERS REFORM

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): I still continue to get petitions with respect to the standing orders, the way they currently exist and the way in which the rules have been changed so that debate cannot take place in a full and complete democratic fashion. I'll read this to you, Mr Speaker. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the people of Ontario want rigorous discussion on legislation dealing with public policy issues like health care, education and care for seniors; and

"Whereas many people in Ontario believe that the Mike Harris government is moving too quickly and recklessly, creating havoc with the provision of quality health care, quality education; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has passed new legislative rules which erode the ability of both the public and the media to closely scrutinize the actions of the Ontario government; and

"Whereas Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, when they were in opposition, defended the rights of the opposition and used the rules to their full advantage when they believed it was necessary to slow down the passage of controversial legislation; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has now reduced the amount of time that MPPs will have to debate the important issues of the day; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government, through its rule changes, has diminished the role of elected members of the Legislative Assembly who are accountable to the people who elect them, and instead has chosen to concentrate power in the Premiers office in the hands of people who are not elected officials;

"We, the undersigned, call upon Mike Harris to withdraw his draconian rule changes and restore rules which

promote rigorous debate on contentious issues and hold the government accountable to the people of Ontario."

I've signed this petition and I'm now handing it to Lee Ann, who will take it to the Clerk's desk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Orders of the day.

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): Government notice of motion number 48.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we don't have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Would you check if there's a quorum.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House pertaining to Bill 149, An act to continue the reforms begun by the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997, and to make other amendments respecting the financing of local government, when Bill 149 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs;

That the standing committee on finance and economic affairs shall be authorized to meet to consider the bill for four days during the next recess;

That all proposed amendments shall be tabled with the clerk of the committee by 5 pm on the fifth calendar day following the final day of consideration referred to in the previous paragraph;

That the committee shall further be authorized to meet for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill for one day during the said recess; and that the committee shall be authorized to meet beyond its normal hour of adjournment that day until the completion of clause-by-clause consideration;

At 5 pm on that day, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any divisions required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 127(a);

That the committee shall report the bill to the House on the first sessional day that reports from committees may be received following the completion of clause-by-clause consideration. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on the date provided, the bill shall be deemed to have been passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House;

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That upon receiving the report of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading;

That one sessional day shall be allotted to the third-reading stage of the bill. At 5:45 pm or 9:15 pm, as the case may be, on such day, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment;

That the vote on third reading of the bill may, at the request of any chief whip of a recognized party in the House, be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding "deferred votes";

That in the case of any division relating to any proceeding on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): Point of order; point of privilege.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The member for Cochrane South on a point of order.

Mr Bisson: Mr Speaker, by way of a point of privilege, I just want to mention — I think this is quite important — that the government House leader now holds the record for the House leader having introduced the most closure motions of any government in the past history of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: You rose on a point of order and changed it to a point of privilege. I'm not sure if it's either one.

Mr David Turnbull (York Mills): It is not even correct.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the minister from —

Hon David Johnson: Allow me to introduce myself: Don Mills.

To the member for Cochrane South, I would say not only is that not a point of order, but, as the whip has pointed out, it's not even factually correct, because the NDP government —

Interjection: How many?

Hon David Johnson: How many time allocations? There were 23 time allocations, establishing the all-time record. It is preferable, however, not to have to time allocate.

Here we have a measure that is for the benefit of the people of Ontario, because this bill, along with Bill 106, its companion bill — the two bills go hand-in-glove — create a fair assessment system across the province. I doubt there is anybody today who would say that across Ontario the assessment system that we have, city by city,

town by town, community by community, across the province is a fair system.

In recognition of that, the former government attempted to address the assessment system. I'm sure the member for Cochrane South, being a member of that government, will remember well the attempt, for example, to bring in a fairer system in Metropolitan Toronto.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham East): They blinked.

Hon David Johnson: The member is saying they blinked. They gave in. They caved in. They threw up their arms. They ran. They left the problem unaddressed, the unfairness in the situation, the fact that some people, not only in Toronto but in many communities across the province, are paying too much in property taxes. There's no question about that. Certainly examples could be given in Metropolitan Toronto. I remember back when the NDP tried to grapple with this issue. I think it was in 1991 or 1992, in about that time frame.

There are some 40,000 homes in Metropolitan Toronto that have an exemption that goes way back to the First World War. The veterans coming back from the war were given a partial exemption, to be more correct. At that point in time, it was the appropriate thing to do. It was the proper thing to do, to recognize those people who had fought for freedom, fought for our democratic way of life, fought for Canada, fought for the free world. But that was the First World War — long decades ago. I think we all recognize that today none of those returning veterans would still be in the homes that received that partial exemption, yet those partial exemptions exist as of today in some 40,000 homes in Metropolitan Toronto. The taxes they pay are a fraction of what their neighbour across the street in a similar house would pay. It's just not fair.

Over the years the property tax system in Metropolitan Toronto hasn't been updated since the early 1950s. It's actually based on data developed in the 1940s and implemented in the 1950s. Many changes have occurred. Newer residential properties in particular are hard-hit by the current system.

This government, like the previous government, said: "We should do something about this. We should restore a fairness to make sure that people aren't paying too much in their property tax." But unlike the previous government, we are committed to the fairness. We are carrying through. As a result, you see Bill 106 and you see this bill today.

Interjection.

Hon David Johnson: My colleague from Kingston and The Islands mentions businesses. Certainly a couple of components of this bill deal with the business community. I can recall that back when the NDP attempted to deal with this in the early 1990s, one of the hardest-hit sectors was the small business sector. Some businesses benefited, obviously, because the overall tax load wouldn't go up, but some businesses would have received an increase in their assessment and an increase in their taxation. Particularly some small businesses along the Danforth, along Yonge Street would have been hard-hit. Very small businesses were lumped in with huge businesses, all in the retail-commercial category. I don't think that was fair.

Mr O'Toole: We're making it fairer.

Hon David Johnson: So we're making it fair, as I'm being prompted from behind.

Interjection: More categories.

Hon David Johnson: And more categories.

Mr Turnbull: Don't forget to mention utility rights of way.

Hon David Johnson: We have about four speakers at the same time. I'm getting lots of help.

The additional categories will allow the municipalities to deal with this situation and to ensure a fairness for those small businesses so that they will be compared among themselves but not compared with larger businesses, and consequently will not get hit with the huge taxes.

Some mention has been made about market value assessment, that market value assessment is being implemented. I can tell you, that's far from the truth. If pure market value assessment were being implemented across all categories, there would be huge changes, with immense impacts on the residential sector, small businesses and many other components. This is a fairer way to do it. It gives the municipalities the ability, within classes, to establish a fairness, and it doesn't shift the burden to any great degree between classes. It is not a pure market value system; it's far from it.

It's a fairer system that has caps built into it; that has phasing built into it; that has controls between classes built into it; that has additional sectors for dealing with the small business community; that has supports built in for the elderly, for many people who have owned their homes for years and years and years, who are getting on in life and will not be able to afford a tax increase, should there be one. Many, I might say, will go down.

Many of the elderly will find that they have been paying too much in taxes over the years and they're going to get a break out of this and their taxes will actually go down. But for those who might go the other way, might go up, the municipalities will have the ability to defer taxes, an eight-year phase-in to deal with that, so the elderly are protected. Again, I think we need to reiterate over and over that many homeowners, including the elderly, will find that their assessments will actually go down, that they've been paying too much over the years, and they'll get the tax break they deserved some time ago.

With those few comments, I'm being reminded by notes coming in that I'm splitting my time with the member for St Andrew-St Patrick, the member for Northumberland, the member for Brampton North and the member for Etobicoke-Rexdale. I know they will have considerable comment and worth to add to this whole discussion, so with those few comments I will sit down and leave the floor to the member for St Andrew-St Patrick.

1520

Ms Isabel Bassett (St Andrew-St Patrick): I thank the member for Don Mills for sitting down, because with the speakers here today, who all don't lack for words, I'm

sure we're going to need every minute left on the rostrum to get through all the points we want to make about 149.

I'd like to speak on the motion to close the second reading debate on Bill 149, that is officially called the Fair Municipal Finance Act. Bill 149, coupled with the reforms already passed in the Fair Municipal Finance Act, would give Ontario a property assessment and tax system that's fair, consistent, understandable and accountable.

Mr Morley Kells (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): And reasonable.

Ms Bassett: And reasonable, as one of my colleagues points out. It's long overdue, getting that in. It's certainly urgent that we move ahead with Bill 149 so that on January 1, 1998, all Ontarians can benefit from a fairer system.

Bill 149 has specific measures that respond to feedback that we received from municipalities, non-profit organizations, small businesses and others, including opposition members. Small businesses were concerned, they told us, that they may face large tax increases as a result of the assessment update and the way municipalities choose to deal with the revenue changes resulting from the elimination of the business occupancy tax. Bill 149 addresses these concerns by introducing three tiers of commercial tax rates that municipalities will have the option of implementing in order to offset the changes caused by the elimination of the BOT. Small businesses in lower-valued commercial properties, such as small retail strip stores, could benefit from this provision of having three tiers.

The bill also addresses concerns about development. Currently, farm land that has been purchased by a developer is assessed as farm land until farming stops. However, some farm land, pending development, attracts very little property tax relative to its value, particularly in the urban fringe. If passed, Bill 149 would balance the needs of farmers, developers and municipalities with a staged approach to taxing farm land pending development. To balance goals that benefit Ontarians, Bill 149 would preserve farm land and encourage bona fide farming, encourage development at reasonable cost and ensure that the parties pay their fair share of property taxes according to use and value of the land. We believe that's a fair method.

Bill 149 would also provide further protection to low-income seniors and disabled homeowners from tax changes resulting from a reassessment by extending the tax relief program in Bill 106 to the education portion of the property tax. The Fair Municipal Finance Act also allows for municipalities to phase in tax changes resulting from reassessment over a period of up to eight years. Bill 149 would allow the education portion of residential property tax to be phased in for up to the same time.

Bill 149 would also make the property tax system fairer for vacant commercial and industrial lands and units by taxing them at lower rates than currently is done. This would recognize the absence of business activity and ensure that owners of vacant land and units are treated fairly under the changes to the property tax system that the government is in the process of implementing. Had we not done this, vacant lands could have been taxed as fully operational entities.

Bill 149 would also recognize the benefits charitable groups provide to the community by allowing municipalities to give charities tax rebates when they occupy business property.

Bill 149's provisions encourage Toronto's competitiveness as an international theatre city, along with the vital contribution of small theatres to this industry. Metro Toronto's commercial live theatre industry is the third-largest in the world, and it attracts 90% of Ontario's live theatre audience. However, Metro's largest commercial theatres pay higher property taxes than both their international competitors in New York and London and their publicly owned local competitors. By exempting Metro's commercial live theatres and theatres with less than 1,000 seats from property taxes, Bill 149 would benefit an important generator of jobs.

In another key area of Ontario's economy, Bill 149 addresses rights of way. The bill's provisions to set tax levels per acre for nine geographic regions of the province would eliminate a patchwork of tax rates and an uncertain tax base. This would also protect rights of way from reform-related tax increases while ensuring that municipalities have a stable revenue base at the same time.

Every Ontarian who does business with the United States knows the vital role played by our international bridges and tunnels. By levelling the playing field for all 14 international crossings, Bill 149 would enhance Ontario's international competitiveness. We estimate that under the new system, the total tax for all international crossings will be below the total tax paid under the old system in 1997.

For the telecommunications industry and as part of the Who Does What initiative, Bill 149 moves the gross receipts tax from municipalities to the province. This bill would help cut administrative costs and would eliminate the outdated way of distributing GRT revenue among municipalities based on phone rentals.

Bill 149 reaffirms the province's commitment to paying its fair share of taxes in support of local government services. The bill would ensure that payment in lieu of property tax paid on provincial properties to municipalities continues.

We listened to the opposition's views about the number of regulations in the original bill, and we responded by setting out as many matters as possible in the legislation rather than dealing with them in regulation, as the original bill did.

At the beginning of second reading, the Minister of Finance proposed amendments to move seven regulatory measures into legislation. These amendments affect the measures provided for — and I'm going to read them off because they're important — taxing farm land pending development, tax reductions for vacant commercial and industrial lands and units, a level playing field for large commercial live theatres, supporting small, privately owned live theatres, defining which charitable organizations qualify for property tax rebates, creating nine

geographic regions for taxing right-of-way properties, and lastly, maintaining current provisions of sharing of assessed value among tenants pending the passage of the education quality bill.

1530

Putting these measures into the legislation rather than regulation would offer more certainty for municipalities and taxpayers. This government is open to suggestions for improving the legislation. To encourage public input, the minister also released draft regulations before Bill 149 goes to committee in a couple of weeks.

It is essential to remember that previous governments resisted fixing the property tax system because of the difficult issues that had to be confronted. Unfortunately, this delay was at the expense of taxpayers and local governments. It allowed the system to become confusing and more unfair. Ontarians everywhere have told us to fix these problems, and we are fixing them. Ontarians want us now to get on with the job.

This government is committed to the principle of fairness and consistency. By delivering on this commitment, the bill would help reduce barriers to investment and economic growth and improve Ontario's long-term competitiveness.

It's important for Ontarians that we move ahead with the measures in Bill 149 to ensure a smooth and efficient transition to the fair property tax system that benefits all property owners in Ontario.

Ontario taxpayers want a fair property tax assessment and property tax system. They expect the government to put a fairer system in place, and we are delivering.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): It's a pleasure for me to be able to say a few words on Bill 149, the second in the series of fair municipal finance acts —

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and The Islands): We're dealing with closure.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much.

Ontario is the only jurisdiction I know of where it takes more brains to sort out the rationale for property taxes than it takes to go out and earn the money to pay them.

Take a home in Scarborough versus a home in Toronto of the same size and value and you'll find that in Scarborough you pay twice the taxes you pay in Toronto. Take a home in Campbellford that looks very much like, and is similar in size to, one in Scarborough and you'll find in Campbellford you pay twice as much as you would in Scarborough and receive very few services.

I question the opposition: Does that make sense? They held the government, each for about five years, and did nothing about this kind of inequity in Ontario.

The municipal tax system has been crying for change for years and years, probably since back in the 1940s, that a lot of our assessments go back to. This is the first government in many years that is doing anything about that assessment.

One of the basic fundamentals we have in a democratic society is that there should be no taxation without representation. However, this has not always been true. From 1988 to 1989, I served with CIDA in Indonesia. I had to sign off my rights to voting but they did not take away my right to taxation. They still taxed me and I had to pay full taxes while I was out of the country, but I did not get the chance to vote in either the municipal election or the federal election in the fall of 1988. I'm pleased to report that the PC government of the day, when I brought this to their attention and expressed my concern, corrected that inequity. I'm very pleased to report that now people working with CIDA have the opportunity to vote when they're abroad, like residents of most other countries when they are abroad.

There's just no question that regardless of the taxation of whatever government, whether it be income tax or property tax, it must be fair and it must be equitable. I'd like to share with you a quote from Will Rogers:

"People want just taxes more than they want lower taxes. They want to know that everyone is paying their proportionate share according to their wealth."

The Fair Municipal Finance Act, Bill 106, received royal assent back on May 27 and it was brought in to ensure that property valuation would be consistent across the province and that it would all be based on the current value a willing buyer would be prepared to pay to a willing seller as an arm's-length transaction, and that it would be kept current on an annual basis.

It's so important that property owners understand the assessment procedure and that they understand the taxation. Right now there is no way the average person can understand property taxes. As this is particular one is being brought in, I'm probably going to be a loser because I have an older home and they tell me I'm probably going to have my taxes go up a far greater proportion than some of the other people. But what's fair is fair and there is no question there.

It will be a simple formula, the assessed value times the mill rate, and there are your taxes, very different from the complicated system we have today, particularly when you look at education tax with the very complex formulas, as I found out when I tried to follow it through for the residents of Campbellford, with all the adjustments here and there because of assessments at different times. It was horrendously confusing and an awful lot of people in the business can't understand it either.

This certainly flies in the face of democratic principles. Taxation really should be clear, concise, transparent, understandable, fair and equitable particularly to those who have to foot the bill. I believe we should have a tax system that looks like someone designed it on purpose, and Bill 106 and the follow-up bill we're speaking on today, Bill 149, will do just that.

Bill 149, the second finance bill, following 106, is a very important bill, as I look at it, for my riding in Northumberland, a rural area. It will be impacting that area in three different ways. First, it will ensure that small businesses are treated fairly. Second, it will preserve farm land and encourage bona fide farming. It will being fairness and consistency to tax treatment of utility and railroad rights of way.

First, looking at the small businesses and that they are treated fairly, Bill 149 will allow municipalities to have a tiered tax rate. This will apply particularly to commercial classes. For example, a small business that's on a lower-valued property such as a strip mall or a neighbourhood shopping district could benefit from a lower tax rate. It addresses the concerns of small business and overcomes the large amounts of red tape that might be the case for municipalities. In connection with farm land pending development, this has certainly been a big problem in the past: a big debate over whether it's still farm land or whether it's now officially subdivision land and should be charged at a much higher rate. Bill 149 will allow for three different tax rates and this will relate to the different stages of development.

This will provide a balance for farmers, for developers and also for the municipalities. In fact, it will preserve farm land and encourage the supply of development-ready land ready to go and it will recognize as it moves through, not complicated at all — what's been complicated has been, when do you change the magic thing from farm land to become developed land? Here we can move it through in easy, step-wise fashion.

Municipalities will have a fair property tax rate considering the use and value of that vacant land. Also in relation to these bills, Bill 149 is going to recognize that farm land can be taxed at 25% of the assessed value, similar to managed forests at a 25% taxation level, and environmentally friendly, we will be exempting conservation lands from taxes. This is something that environmentalists have been asking for for some time and will certainly enhance wetlands in Ontario.

Third, there's going to be some fairness and consistency with taxation as it relates to utility and railway rights of way. Last Monday morning I had the opportunity to meet with several of the municipal leaders and clerk-treasurers in Northumberland and they really expressed a significant concern about the sort of patchwork kind of arrangement we have in tax rates for rights of way in the province. It really was very frustrating to them and they were saying it didn't make very much sense. I'm pleased to report that Bill 149 will correct some of those serious inequities in how properties are taxed and assessed. It will set a tax level per acre in some nine geographical areas in the province.

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Rural municipalities, the taxes that come from these particular components, are very important to helping with their balance sheet. They will certainly be welcomed to stabilize some of the revenue base that they look towards.

Also, I find it refreshing in this bill that we're going to recognize charitable organizations when they're renting or occupying space in buildings. They will be able to get back 40% of the tax that will be allocated to that particular area in the building. This certainly goes along with this government's encouragement for volunteers and recognizing volunteers and voluntary activity in the province. We recognize that in Canada, on a per capita basis, we volunteer twice as much as any other country in the world and that probably is one of the main reasons why Canada is recognized as one of the greatest countries in the world to live in.

In closing, this is a government —

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): In spite of 10 lost years.

Mr Galt: Yes, it has been 10 lost years and we've now had two that are getting it straightened out. I'm so pleased you brought that to my attention.

We have a government that in many bills and in many instances has been listening to the public and not only listening but responding to their concerns. That is true in the case of this bill. The public and businesses have been talking about the problem with municipal taxation and assessment. I'm certainly looking forward to this bill going out on the road to committee hearings and hearing the consultation process and the information that will be fed to this government at that time.

They say there are only two certainties, death and taxes. The only difference is death doesn't get worse every time a provincial Parliament meets. I believe that Bill 106 and Bill 149, the fair municipal finance bills, will ensure that Ontario's tax system remains fair and equitable long after this session of Parliament is over.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton North): I am excited to speak on this particular bill. One of the reasons is that we began this process with Bill 106 in January of this year, and I remember, when I was a member of that finance committee at the time, that we travelled to Ottawa and Thunder Bay. We even went to smaller towns, where small businesses were a critical component of the changes to the Assessment Act, Bill 106, and certainly now to this act.

We went to places like Chatham — and the Vice-Chair of the committee was the member for Niagara South, Tim Hudak — and Port Colborne. Port Colborne is an excellent example of a small town that has a number of businesses that we want to be able to succeed. We want it to be able to create jobs in this province, and changing the assessment structure for businesses in this province is a critical element of business success.

The multi-tiered commercial tax rate: This provision allows upper- and single-tier municipalities to set lower tax rates for lower-valued commercial properties. You know and you've heard that the municipality could set a threshold of assessed value for the community, then they can tax the portion of each property's assessed value below this threshold at a lower rate. That's critical for small businesses because they have to meet a payroll. Running a business that is non-profit is not a business, it's a charity. If you're in business, then darn it, you're there to make a profit and the small business owner is relying on the profitability of that business just to exist.

The Fair Municipal Finance Act requires municipalities to provide a program of tax relief on the municipal portion of the property tax paid by low-income property owners who are seniors or who have disabilities. You know the imbalance of taxes that are paid by seniors and people on

disability. They have difficulty paying their share of tax like other regular income earners.

School boards can reimburse the municipality for the education portion of the deferral and will in turn be reimbursed by the province. But this almost becomes outdated because, under the new funding formula this province will be coming out with very soon, we will have a proper, fair share funding formula for the education system. But the critical portion of this comment is that low-income seniors and persons with disabilities would be protected from tax changes resulting from reassessment.

This legislation was the first step in this government's effort to make property assessment fair, to make it consistent and to make it understandable. Taxpayers must be able to hold their governments accountable at all levels, provincially as well as municipally, and this act will be fair because similar properties in a community with similar values will pay similar taxes.

It builds firmly on the fairness principle of the reforms that our government introduced in January with the Fair Municipal Finance Act and that is the reason why time allocation has been called. Let's get on with it. It's about time that we take the business of this government to the streets and let small business get on with doing what they should be doing, running a business the most cost-efficient way, maximizing their profitability for a very specific reason, and that reason is that profitability creates jobs, not government. Business profitability creates jobs.

The government has listened to the specific concerns expressed by businesses, by the theatre, as the member St Andrew-St Patrick indicated, by municipalities and other groups. We've heard those concerns and we are doing our best to try to address them.

These changes are an important step in reducing the duplication and the overlap between provincial government and the municipalities. It includes measures that my colleagues have talked about in detail that mean fair tax treatment for small business and owners of business properties, publicly owned commercial live theatres, municipalities, owners of right-of-way properties, a group of the segment that is constantly being ignored but an important element, charitable organizations and, as my friend Mr Galt talked about, farmers and developers.

As the Minister of Finance has already told the Legislature, the government proposes to introduce seven amendments to Bill 149. What does this mean? It means a number of measures that are now being dealt with through regulations will be inscribed in legislation so games can't be played at the lower level. This means fairness for owners of business properties.

I talk about small businesses, just to name a few in my community: George and Jon Tyner; Ralph Nijme, who runs a Harvey's store; Bob Nutbrown; David and Andrew, who run a very small clothing store but a successful clothing store in Brampton, along with the Tyners, called David-Andrew; Gary and Frankie Avery, who run GM Jewellers; John Pappain from Peel Resource Recovery; and the little restaurant guys, Gianni from Vesuvio, Alfredo from La Capannina, Tina from Fanzorelli's.

George Theodoropolus from downtown Brampton just opened a restaurant seven months ago called Theia's. Fantastic food. We need to give this man an opportunity to succeed. He just opened a business. He sunk hundreds of thousands of dollars investing in a new business. We want to have the opportunity and create the environment for George to succeed. We've got Joe and Rocky from Gentlemen's Choice, John Logan and Keith Coulter, Lou Duggan of Armor Personnel, Al Brannon from Brannon Steel. These people are all successful businesspeople who struggled during the tough periods. We must be able to create an environment for them to be more successful. Why? Because they create jobs. That's the bottom line: They create jobs. That's what we want people to do. That's what business does.

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Small businesses and lower-valued commercial properties, such as small neighbourhood shopping districts or retail strip malls, benefit from these provisions. When I think of these kinds of businesspeople, I think of Ken Cheung from Lai Sing investments. He works terrifically. He isn't just a grand master of the tae kwon-do club, but he also owns a number of properties in Brampton which are greatly beneficial to the community. He was also my master, because I was once in tae kwon-do, until I got elected and got fat. No comments on that one, eh? The opposition doesn't want to bless us with a comment on that one.

Mr Pouliot: You just lost 10 pounds.

Mr Spina: Yes, I did. Thank you, member.

We also have other investors in Brampton for whom we are quite pleased to create an environment for them to succeed. John Cutruzzola from Inzola Construction: Not only did they build city hall, but he has a partnership agreement in building a new marketplace in downtown Brampton with a dozen theatres, a place where the community can gather day in and day out and create a core in the middle of the city that is truly a successful environment for us to create jobs and economic success in our community.

Max Rice is another contributor around town who owns properties and has created jobs in many different ways, but not just in Brampton. The Rice family and the Rice group is a contributor in Mississauga, a contributor in London, Ontario, and many other communities in this province, in many different ways. They don't just own commercial properties like strip malls; they also own and operate properties where we have a provincial courthouse; they own trailer parks for low-income-housing people; they own and operate the Southbrook property, which is a residence for seniors. They make a great contribution to all aspects of our society in our community.

I'm pleased that the legislation we are involved in here will give us the opportunity to provide the environment for these people to succeed. My own landlord where my constituency office is, Jeff Kerbel, of Kerbel Investments — the Kerbel family has been well known throughout

Ontario in many endeavours they have gotten involved in, with partners and on their own, properties in Toronto, in Peel, both Mississauga and Brampton, properties all over the place that contribute to job environments.

You know what I think of when I think of the plaza where my little constituency office is, up above the drugstore? I think of a young man named Miroslav, who came to Canada from Poland six years ago, who spoke very few words of English. You know what? Today Miroslav is the contractor who looks after the maintenance of three of the Kerbel properties. He has commercial vehicles, pickup trucks and other equipment that he operates; he employs at least four other people as part of the service he delivers to the Kerbel group and to other landlords. This is a great example of a young man who came to Canada, and what did he do? He created an opportunity for himself, because other people created the business opportunity for him to grow and succeed. That's what we want to be able to do.

The provision that would allow municipalities to create the three bands of assessment that my colleague spoke about is an example of how a municipality now begins to act as a partner with the local businesses to boost those small businesses, to be able to create the opportunities that small businesses need to succeed, to create opportunities for young men like Miroslav.

Mr Pouliot: What about Frank Stronach?

Mr Spina: People talk about Mr Stronach, and Mr Stronach has been another example, but over a longer period of time. He is an excellent example.

Mr Gerretsen: He is a big business man.

Mr Spina: He has now crossed the line to be a big business man. You know something? The changes in the assessment structure are also going to help big business people. Everybody has to have an opportunity to create jobs because, to reiterate the comment I made earlier, government doesn't create the jobs; it's business that creates the jobs.

In my previous portfolio with Minister Saunderson in economic development and trade, I was the parliamentary assistant responsible for small business. I saw many opportunities. We have to create a number of initiatives to feed small business, allow it the opportunity to grow. Why do we need time allocation on a bill that is creating a change for a more positive tax assessment? That's the reason: for small businesses to be able to start up, expand, grow and create jobs.

I learned a lot, not just when I was in government but for the 15 years I worked with small business before I was elected by the people of my constituency. I'm pleased to see that the small enterprise centres we started are now becoming a vital element of starting up small businesses. We've launched that program and we're looking forward to the opportunity to see it grow across this province.

I now can say, in my role as parliamentary assistant to northern development, that we're going to be opening an enterprise centre soon in Sudbury and we're looking for more opportunities to be developed in northern Ontario.

If there is any one segment of this province that would truly benefit from the changes to the Assessment Act and to the municipal environment, the capability of the municipalities to help feed those businesses, it is northern and rural Ontario, because that is where the small businesses are.

My friend from Lake Nipigon acknowledges that outside of the large mining companies in the communities, I think he will agree with me, the economy in northern Ontario is small business. He speaks after me, so I'll look forward to the comments he will be making.

You see, that is what we are trying to create, that environment in this province where we have a structure that allows the municipalities to grow, allows the municipalities to be flexible in dealing with the opportunities they create for those people in their community, for those small business people, for those job creators.

We talked about an example of how a municipality could put some of these measures to work. As an example, they could set an appropriate threshold for commercial property values, say $250,000. You can pick any number. It could be higher or lower, depending on what the critical value is for your community. If you had a smaller community and it was felt that that value, that threshold, would be better at $125,000, you would have the flexibility to do it for $125,000. But if they felt it was $250,000 or, perhaps in the case of the city of Toronto, $375,000, the beauty of this is that the municipality has the flexibility.

I believe you, Speaker, were a mayor of the fine town of Listowel for a while. That's an example of a community in rural Ontario where small business needs the opportunity to expand, to grow and to thrive.

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Let's get back to that threshold for commercial property values. That municipality can apply the lower tax rate to the assessed values that fall below that threshold and a higher tax rate to the assessed values above that threshold. What does that do? That gives the municipality the ability to be a partner, a partner with the small business community.

Mr Derwyn Shea (High Park-Swansea): Tailormade tax structure.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): Great flexibility.

Mr Spina: My colleague the member for High Park-Swansea says this is tailormade tax structure to help businesses. My friend the member for Peterborough states this is flexible. That's exactly what we intend this legislation to provide: flexibility and tailormaking to help small businesses.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): A team speech: "with a little help from my friends."

Mr Spina: Well, this caucus is a team. The member for Algoma, my old home town, says this is teamwork. Yes, it is. You know what? I take great pride in stating that if nothing else, this caucus has solidarity and we are very proud of that solidarity. I use that word specifically, because it's not a privileged word for unions in this province; it's something that any team that works together can use. That's what this caucus is about. Regardless of

comments that may have been made outside of this caucus, you must remember that not one member of this caucus has resigned from it, nor has one member of this caucus been asked to leave. That is commitment. That is commitment from the leader down, and it's a commitment from the team all the way up.

Let's get back to the point at hand, the relevant debate we are into right now, and that has to do with Bill 149 and the time allocation. There was a comment earlier about how many time allocations this government had pulled on this Legislature. The reality is that nothing could match the previous government in time allocation motions. Furthermore, what compounded the problem with the last government, we felt, was the number of orders in council that they actually delivered. The Legislature didn't even sit for the spring of 1995. It sat for 10 days in the fall of 1994. Tons of legislation came through, and it was all time allocated in the short time frame or it was rammed through order in council. You accuse us of being dictators? Holy mackerel, I don't know that I have ever seen such a dictatorial government as the last one.

What can we say? We are trying to create an environment here. We brought bills forward starting in January of this year through to spring of this year. We finally got Bill 106 through. Now we're trying to get Bill 149 through. Why? We're trying to get it through strictly, solely and purely to help businesses in this province. That's the objective. That's what we are trying to achieve.

But we have also an opportunity for municipalities to address the flexibility with residential property owners. That's an opportunity for residential property owners also to have a chance to either have tax reductions or fair value assessment for their properties.

To ensure that the municipalities can't target specific businesses for higher taxes, the government can prescribe restrictions on the use of this provision in regulation. I think back to an opportunity where we got talking about development charges and how development charges were implemented at one point. The problem we faced in Brampton was this: The Chrysler Corp, back before Chrysler bought it, was a facility built by American Motors when it was owned by Renault; now the building is the Chrysler Bramalea assembly plant. It is, without doubt, the pride of industrial facilities in my riding, with two shifts —

Mr Pouliot: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With respect, I understand that the address is somewhat long and prolonged indeed, but surely we should still have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Would you check to see if there's a quorum present, please.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Brampton North.

Mr Spina: In my remaining couple of minutes, what I might do is seek unanimous consent for my colleague the member for High Park-Swansea to say a few words when I finish. Would that be agreeable?

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Mr Wildman: You don't need unanimous consent.

Mr Gerretsen: If he knew the rules, he would know that. Read your own rules, would you?

The Acting Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr Spina: Good. To ensure that the municipalities don't target specific businesses for higher taxes, I said the government can prescribe restrictions on the use of this provision in regulation. I was talking about the development charges on the Bramalea Chrysler plant, where all the development charges that had to do with the infrastructure of creating that particular plant facility were covered in the initial construction of that plant.

Now we are approximately 10 years later, and Chrysler wanted to add a small addition to that plant. It allows them the flexibility to create about 200 more jobs, as a matter of fact. What happened was that because of the arbitrary development rules, Chrysler was going to be facing an $800,000 development charge. For what? The infrastructure was in place. No costs were going to be incurred by the municipality as a result of this expansion, because everything was in place to accommodate this expansion.

Fortunately, the passage of Bill 106 helped the municipality to be flexible in how they addressed that. With an agreement that was made between the city of Brampton, Brampton Hydro and other people in the community, the school board, Mayor Peter Robertson deserves the credit for leading that battle in ensuring that the development charges were covered and we were able to create the expansion at Chrysler and the jobs that accompanied that.

What we want to ensure is that we create an environment with this bill, with the changes and the flexibilities for the municipalities to alter, that they have the flexibility to work with their business partners.

This measure addresses the concerns of small businesses in a way that avoids creating large amounts of red tape for municipalities.

When I talk about the red tape for municipalities, we can't forget the member for Lincoln, who is the chair of our red tape commission. I'm pleased to be a member of that. They do a great job on bringing forward the issues that are red tape that have been created over the past 10 years, or in some cases longer. Mr Sheehan's commission has brought forward many issues that we have been able to cut, and there's nothing prouder that we could ask for. When the member for Lincoln appears at a function and is able to cut real red tape, then it works, because that creates a much better environment for municipalities to be able to create jobs.

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The reality is that these businesses will become the winners. They will be the winners and when they are the winners, the people of Ontario become the winners, the people who now will have jobs and job opportunities, which were severely curtailed over recent years.

The objective we are trying to achieve is what we promised when we started in the election campaign in

1995, which was to create 725,000 new jobs in this province. Halfway or a little less than halfway through our mandate, we are just about halfway to achieving that goal, and we're extremely pleased with that. We're producing 1,000 jobs a day. It started slowly and we were under a lot of criticism from the opposition: "Where's the jobs? Where's the jobs?" You can't turn the Titanic around in a small bay, but you know what? We are turning around. The Titanic is now becoming the Queen Elizabeth and a grand proud ship called Ontario.

Mr Gerretsen: Let me just say that if he's so interested in seeing the red tape bills being approved by this House, why doesn't he have his government leader call those red tape bills into the House? They've been sitting there for about the last six months or so. Why doesn't he call them one at a time? We will deal with them here, we will debate them here and we will more likely than not approve them. But they haven't been called. Those red tape bills have not been called in the last six months and the real question is, why isn't the government House leader calling those red tape bills?

The other observation I have of the last speaker is his entire speech dealing with the value of small business in our communities. Let me just tell you that I too value the small businesses in our municipality. They are the people who make the economy grow and they are certainly the people who employ by far the largest number of people in Ontario. I think anything that we can do to help small business we should certainly be totally behind.

But now let's take a look at what will happen to small business as a result of this particular law, this Bill 149. What he forgets to tell people of Ontario is that, first of all, the commercial property owners will still be paying education taxes. Yes, they'll still be paying education taxes, the full education taxes that they've been paying so far, whereas half of the education taxes will no longer be paid by the residential property taxpayers.

The net result of all this is going to be that the small business owners, the small commercial property owners in this province are going to be paying a lot more, on the average, in property taxes than they were before the implementation of this bill, once it gets through. That's what the small business owners of this province should clearly understand: that they will still be paying in their real estate taxes the full levy of the education taxes that they had in their real estate taxes before.

Anyone who knows anything about assessment in municipalities will clearly understand that if a municipality needs $1 million to run its operation or $100 million to run its operation, all of the money basically comes from the property taxpayers of that municipality — the residential property taxpayers, the commercial property taxpayers and the industrial property taxpayers.

If you in effect have exempted half of the education taxes from the residential property taxpayers, then in order to raise your $100 million to run that municipality, the other people are going to have to pay more. So the commercial property taxpayers and the industrial property taxpayers, as a class and as a whole, are going to be paying more under the new system than they are under the old system.

Don't take my word for it. Call your local municipal treasurer, call your local CAO and ask them whether or not that isn't so. They will agree with me. I'm absolutely convinced of that.

Don't give the small business owners the impression that somehow Bill 149 is going to relieve them for a tax burden, because there's another wrinkle in this whole thing as the member has clearly indicated. The municipalities will have the power under this Bill 149 to in effect set up different bands of assessment in the commercial property class.

So yes, you can place the smaller commercial property owner in a different band, at a different level than another commercial property owner, but there's absolutely no guarantee that this will happen. It will be left up to the local municipal councils to do this, and I would dare say that most local municipal councillors, realizing that there are a heck of a lot more residential property taxpayers out there in most municipalities than commercial property taxpayers — that the system they will set up in their local municipalities will be weighed in favour of the residential property taxpayer.

I would just advise small businesses out there to be very wary of this act. I know the government members have basically given pro-small-business speeches here today, but they bear absolutely no reality to what's really in Bill 149. I'll get back to that a little bit later on.

The first thing I wanted to discuss today is the whole notion that we're dealing here with a time allocation motion. I think it gives us once again an opportunity to talk about some of the rule changes that have been brought in. I notice that the members across the way feel very uncomfortable about that, but I think the people of Ontario should understand what's at stake here. What's at stake here is democracy itself.

In all democratic systems that I'm aware of every sessional day has a question period in it, which allows the opposition an opportunity to ask questions of the government of the day about government policies or what's happening in particular government departments. That's been the norm. That's been the accepted practice throughout the parliamentary system throughout the world.

What's happened here is that basically we now have two sessional days each day when we have a night sitting here, with the second sitting going from 6:30 to 9:30, counted as a sessional day without a question period. I'm sure the average person out there will say, "What difference does it make?" The difference it makes is that after so many sessional days of debate on a particular bill, the government can either invoke closure or in effect a bill can be talked about and a vote can be taken. What that really means is that during that period of time the number of question periods the opposition has to hold the government of the day accountable has been halved, has been limited severely.

The other thing, we heard a lot today here about how the former government invoked closure 23 times and this government's only done it eight or nine times. Quite frankly, I'm not too concerned about all that, as to what the old government did and what they're doing so far about this. What I'm concerned about is the fact that, up until 10 years ago, closure was almost an unknown thing in the parliamentary system we have here in Ontario. Now it has become almost more and more of an everyday occasion. That's the thing that really concerns me.

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Let's just have a little review of the bills they've invoked closure on so far: Bill 96, the rent control bill, or the rent decontrol bill. It is the bill that in effect does away with rent control in this province. That was time-allocated. The workers' compensation bill, Bill 99, which we had so many demonstrations about around this place, that was time-allocated. The workfare bill, Bill 142, on which we heard today during question period that now we are sending 64-year-olds out for retraining, people who have made 3,000 applications, who have had at least 1,000 personal contacts. What are we doing with them at age 64? We're sending them for retraining. It's absolute nonsense. Anyway, that was a bill on which closure was invoked. The megacity bill, Bill 148, the same thing: Closure was invoked.

Bill 152, the bill that's downloading all those social services and health care services on local municipalities, is being time-allocated. By the way, on October 6 — what is the date? Today is October 2, so that will be on Monday. I received the assurances of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that on Monday — I guess it's Tuesday — of next week he is going to give each and every municipality all the figures they will need so that they know exactly what's being downloaded to them for next year so that they can prepare their budgets. We look forward to that.

As a matter of fact, it's about the only answer the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has given in this House in the last two years. He gave a direct answer that on October 6, each and every municipality, from the smallest township to the largest city, will get all the facts and figures as to what they can anticipate the cost to be of taking over all these various services that are called for in Bill 152 and as a result of Bill 26 and everything else that has taken place. He seems very self-assured, he's nodding his head yes, and I'm very pleased to hear that.

That's another bill on which you invoked closure, which basically means you don't allow each member in this House, including your own government members, the opportunity to truly debate this bill. There are many members within our small caucus of 31 who still want to talk about Bill 149, and you are denying them a basic democratic right: the opportunity to debate that.

I'm very pleased to see that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance are here today, because I would like to address one other issue. It came up early on in the government's motion as to what exactly the difference is between market value assessment and current value assessment or actual value assessment. I had my staff get the definitions out of the actual act that is being proposed to be passed and the definition of market value as it is in the current legislation.

This is subsection 19(2) of the Assessment Act. Market value is defined to read as follows: "The market value...assessed is the amount that the land might be expected to realize if sold in the open market by a willing seller to a willing buyer." That is the definition.

What is the definition of current value as contained in Bill 106, which is adopted in Bill 149? Current value is "the amount of money" that land would realize "if sold at arm's length by a willing seller to a willing buyer." There are only two words that are different, and those are the words "open market." However, "open market" means nothing, because we're talking about a willing seller to a willing buyer in both cases.

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Is that all the information they gave you?

Mr Gerretsen: That's all the information they gave me, Mr Minister, because that's all the information we need. We will let the people out there judge whether or not those definitions aren't exactly the same.

Hon Mr Leach: Read the rest of it.

Mr Gerretsen: I read the whole definition, the entire definition, Mr Minister, of both market value assessment and current value assessment; in both acts, the exact definition.

We keep going back to the promises that were made in the 1995 election. What's interesting is that I have this sheet here. It's a yellow sheet now. I guess it yellows with age. It's dated June 2, 1995, and it states, "My party and I will never" — and "never" is underlined — "support the imposition of MVA in Metro Toronto." It's Al Leach. I believe that's the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. So here is a minister who said that he would not ever support market value assessment, and he has done so in Bill 106 and Bill 149. What's even worse than that is that he is the minister who introduced those bills; or if he didn't introduce them, he's very closely connected to them.

I will just let the people of Ontario judge to see whether or not this particular member has actually lived up to the promise he made on a very plain sheet of paper, "My party and I will never support the imposition of MVA in Metro Toronto," unless by MVA he meant something entirely different. It is possible that this is some sort of organization or group that has nothing to do with assessment at all. I will certainly try to get unanimous consent if he wishes to stand up right now and tell me that by MVA he meant the Motor Vehicle Act or something like that. Maybe that's what he was talking about. Maybe it wasn't assessment at all. If that is so, I'd like to hear that.

The other person here on the same yellow sheet of paper, by the way, is the member for St Andrew-St Patrick, but she is more imaginative, I would say, because there's a lot more wording on this. She also was actively involved in introducing both of these bills in the House

which are now applying market value assessment to the province. She is saying, "The policy of the PC Party has always been that we will never" — and "never" is in much darker print than anything else on this page — "impose market value assessment on Toronto." She goes a little bit further than that. She says, "We remain firm in that position." Maybe she would like to correct the record, although in her case she cannot say that she was talking about the Motor Vehicle Act or something like that because she does state "market value assessment." So in her case it's a little bit tougher to get out of.

Any time Mr Leach wants to get up and say, "I'm sorry, John, you are totally wrong, I was talking about the Motor Vehicle Act," or something like that, then I will take everything back about you. But, you know, I think he was talking about market value assessment. I think the people in Cabbagetown, Moore Park and Rosedale, the homeowners there — it's interesting that he would only send this to the homeowners. I don't know why he wouldn't send it to the other people. Maybe it's because those people are the ones whose taxes are going up as a result of this reassessment. In any event, it's kind of interesting. It's interesting that here we are again dealing with a motion that basically talks about limiting debate on what the government itself has stated is a very, very crucial matter.

I would just like to deal with some other issues that are contained in the bill. I hope you will give me the latitude not just to talk strictly on the motion but about the subject of the motion, which is this bill itself, because it seems to me the government members spend about 58 minutes of their one hour on that.

One of the interesting things that was stated during the debate was the fact that the payments in lieu are going to be much more direct now than they were before. Well, I beg to differ. It's interesting that in the existing acts that deal with payments in lieu — and again, for the people of Ontario, they should understand that there are some communities, or I dare say, every community doesn't pay property tax on every piece of property that's in that particular municipality.

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There may, for example, be provincial institutions or educational institutions or hospitals and other provincial and federal government agencies that don't pay taxes. What is done instead of paying property taxes is they make payments in lieu of taxes. In my community of Kingston, I think about one third of our entire property inside the city of Kingston is subject to that. The city receives payments in lieu of taxes rather than the tax revenue on those buildings themselves, based on a market value or on any kind of a value system.

But what's interesting is that the comment has been made that municipalities will know a lot better what those payments are going to be from year to year. What I find interesting is that currently in most municipalities where there are hospital institutions, where there are educational institutions, the regulation or the bill clearly sets out that that municipality will receive $75 per head per year.

For example, in my case where we've got Queen's University with about 12,000 students, the municipality receives $75 for each and every student that attends Queen's University. Our local municipality can sort of budget on that $1 million that comes in, rather than the taxes that would normally be assessed on the value of those buildings themselves. That's what the current act states.

But what does the new act state? The new act simply states that the Minister of Finance may make regulations prescribing what those payments in lieu should be. For those people out there who may not know what regulations are exactly, let me just say this. Regulations are basically approved by a minister and then there may be an order in council, so I understand. They're approved by cabinet. It's done behind closed doors and, all of a sudden, you read about them in the Ontario Gazette.

They have no public debate. There is no time for people to have any input into that in a public way. It may very well be that some of your special interest groups may have access to different cabinet ministers or to different cabinets, but that's how it's done. The easiest way for a minister of the crown or for a government to get away from public scrutiny is to have the regulatory power to actually implement that behind closed doors by cabinet itself. There's no public debate on it, so whenever a minister in an act gets more regulatory powers then he currently has, in effect there will be less public debate about that particular matter in the years to come, and that's what's happening here.

For members of the government to get up and say that that system has been made more transparent and more public is totally, totally incorrect because right now those municipalities that rely on a lot of these payments in lieu of taxes know what it's going to be from year to year. Under this act they will not know at all because the minister by regulation can change that at any given moment. So don't tell me it's going to be easier for municipalities to know what that amount is going to be or it's going to be more transparent. The act clearly, clearly contradicts that.

Now, of course, what most of those municipalities want is the real tax dollars that those buildings represent in that municipality. In other words, they want the actual tax dollars. We've heard so much about how this new system is fairer. Well, it's fairer for everybody except for those municipalities that have these kinds of facilities in their municipality because they're still not going to be dealt with fairly.

The fair thing to do would be to assess those buildings, those provincial buildings or those provincial institutions, and to pay to that municipality the proper amount of taxes that they would charge to other people who have buildings of equivalent value. I know those municipalities, mine included, have been after this, not just from this government, but from the previous government, and yes, from the previous Liberal government, and yes, from the previous Tory governments of Bill Davis and John Robarts. This has been an ongoing debate for about 30 or 40 years.

I put it to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that if he really wanted to do something about that situation and since this is such a large bill that is going to change the system in Ontario so drastically, this would have been the perfect opportunity to do something about those tax-exempt properties. Unfortunately, the boat was missed and unfortunately, in those municipalities this problem will become even larger, rather than smaller, as a result of the changes that are in this act.

One of the other things I noted we've been asking for ever since this bill was first produced, and I had a briefing with the finance people at that time and it has been asked for a number of times in this House, is why you don't release the impact studies that you undoubtedly have as to how it's going to affect different municipalities and how it's going to affect different individual taxpayers. Why don't you release them?

As I stated before when I had an opportunity to speak about this bill, from my own personal experience in my own city back in 1982, when we adopted market value assessment, we were told by the province that the difference —

Hon Mr Leach: You were mayor.

Mr Gerretsen: Yes, I was mayor at the time and took a lot of heat over it as well. I'll tell you something. We were told —

Hon Mr Leach: It must be a good system.

Mr Gerretsen: I'm trying to be — you're not being consistent, Mr Minister, if you set up three or four different classes of commercial properties, for example, because you know as well as I do, if you want to be truly fair about it, then you have a market value assessment system over the whole province for every property, whether exempt or not, and regardless of what class they're in, if you want to be really fair about it.

You're trying to make it sound fair but then you know, in different classes and different categories of commercial properties you can't have different rates etc. I'll tell you quite frankly — and I'm certainly totally supportive of the small business that is run in each municipality — if I have a property there that's worth, let's say, $250,000 and I am being charged $10,000 per year on taxes, and somebody else has got a property that's worth $2.5 million in industrial or commercial property, if I were the larger commercial property owner, I would say, "Why shouldn't you pay 10 times more than the guy whose property is valued at a tenth of your value?"

But you're allowing municipalities in this act, in effect, to set different rates for different categories. Then don't call it the fair system any more. Why don't you call it the system in which you basically say, "An act to assist the smaller property taxpayers, the smaller business owners"? Why don't you say, "We want to do something for them," and they in effect will be taxed at half the rate than, let's say, a plant that's worth 10 or 20 times the amount of money?

Hon Mr Leach: What have you got against small business?

Mr Gerretsen: Now he says, "What have you got against small business?" I have nothing against small business. But don't make it sound as if this is totally an actual value assessment system, when you allow all sorts of exceptions and exemptions in it. You can't have it both ways, Mr Minister. You cannot say this is a fair system across Ontario and then allow local municipalities to create all sorts of different classes.

Hon Mr Leach: If it's fair to small business, it's fair to large business.

Mr Gerretsen: Anyway, Mr Minister, you can't have it both ways.

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister without Portfolio [Privatization]): Like you guys.

Mr Gerretsen: No, we tried to be consistent. We certainly —

Interjection.

Mr Gerretsen: Well, it's nice to see that I've woken up the dozens of members who are in the House right now who are undoubtedly listening to this debate.

But you know, you can't stand in the House and say, "This is totally fair to everybody," and then say, "It's going to be a market value system or an actual value system," and then say, "Well, okay, but we're making an exception for this class. They can do something different," and "We can make an exception for another class. They can do something different." It just doesn't wash.

The other one that is very interesting, of course, is the senior citizen exemption or the proposition whereby — undoubtedly the government knows that particularly older residential properties, not just here in Toronto but elsewhere as well, are going to be affected by this. You're going to have some situations where you could look at double the amount of property tax. So what the government is saying is, "If you're a senior citizen, a municipality can in effect pass a bylaw in which some of this money can be deferred." You've always said "deferred." If you read the act, you will see it doesn't only say "deferred," it also says "cancelled."

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If I'm a senior living in a house whose property taxes have doubled as a result of this, I would not like to have a lien on my house for the amount I cannot pay. Most seniors, and I'm sure you have some of these individuals within your own caucus, are the kind of people who have gone through the Depression, they haven't had any debt for the last four or five years, or maybe 20 or 30 years, and they don't want to incur any debt. Many of them don't have credit cards. They don't want to incur debt. They've paid off their mortgage.

Mr O'Toole: So who pays?

Mr Gerretsen: That's the whole point: Who pays? If you've cancel that for a senior citizen, it means the other taxpayers are going to pay more. What's interesting in the debate here is that nobody has ever talked about the cancellation of those taxes. All you've ever talked about is deferring those taxes so they can be paid once the house is sold later on or when the person dies etc.

The point is that the act clearly allows them to cancel those taxes as well. The moment you cancel taxes for one group of people, no matter how justified you feel it is, other people have to pay more. It's as simple as that. If you need X number of dollars to run a municipality and you're giving somebody a tax break, some of the other taxpayers will have to pay more.

I'm not so sure whether that's all that fair either, and I'm not so sure why you haven't talked about the cancellation of taxes, why you only talk about it in terms of deferring taxes when your own bill clearly states you can cancel them as well.

Of course, this bill should not be looked at alone. It's all interconnected. I see a smile on your face, Mr Speaker. It is all interconnected, and we know what it ultimately has to do with.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: As the member thinks about the interconnections and how he might expand on them, I hope we would have a quorum to hear this presentation.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Quorum, please.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Speaker: Member for Kingston and The Islands.

Mr Gerretsen: I appreciate the members coming in to listen to this, because this may be our last opportunity to talk some sense into you. Hopefully, you will make some changes here, particularly in the areas I'm going to talk about now. I will talk about the interconnection between Bill 149 and the other stuff that's happening, the other downloading you're doing on local municipalities.

Mr Wildman: And 152.

Mr Gerretsen: And 152, you're right on. In Bill 152 you are downloading another $663 million on the local taxpayers. That's how it's very closely connected to Bill 149. One of the functions you're downloading on local municipalities is the property assessment function. I don't know how many of you were around back in the late 1960s or early 1970s when all assessment was done at the local level. I wasn't involved, believe it or not, even municipally until 1972. I can tell you, from what others used to tell me, that when the assessment was done at the local level it was a mess. It was subject to political interference, one of the reasons the province took it over. The municipalities didn't come to the province, to the government of John Robarts at the time — or it may have been Bill Davis during his first term; I'm not sure — and say, "Please take over the assessment." No, the province had to take it over, because the number of systems that were appearing throughout the province were so disconnected one from the other that even the province could no longer stand it.

Do you know what you're doing? You're going right back to that, because you cannot have both the assessment function and the setting of the rate, which is done by the local councils, done by the same people. If you look at a municipal budget, no matter what the number is totally, it's made up of the assessment times the mill rate. One of the reasons it worked fairly successfully here in Ontario over the years is that the value of the properties, the assessment aspect, was done by the province over the last 25 years and the rate aspect was done by the local municipalities. If you have the same group of people doing that by a local assessment department, which still hasn't been worked out, or even privately by privatization — I've heard that being mentioned as well. That would be an absolute disaster, because can you imagine the amount of interference there could be with somebody in the private sector who perhaps lives in that municipality and gets accosted by individuals? You know: "Hey, Fred, I don't think my property is worth X number of dollars. It's only worth Y number of dollars."

I can tell you, this may have been a very easy political way for you to sort of download some aspect, $119 million, to local municipalities, but in the long run you will regret it. The assessment function simply ought not to be done by the same people who also set the tax rate for that municipality. There will be manipulations going on. I have a great faith in local government, but that's what happened before and there's absolutely nothing to indicate that it's not going to happen again. I ask you to look at that.

The assessors are very concerned about that as well. There has to be an independent arm, particularly as you're looking, through Bill 149, towards a province-wide system that is basically the same. How can it basically be the same if the assessment functions are going to be dealt with differently by different people in different municipalities? It is just not going to work.

Don't take my word for it. Talk to some of the people in the field. Talk to them about how they feel about the assessment function returning to the local level. It is one of those small items that I suppose there hasn't been much talk about. In social housing, social assistance and the public health aspects and the ambulance aspects, we're talking about a lot more dollars being downloaded locally, but this assessment function may be the one that in the long run you regret the most, because it shouldn't be done by the same people.

But there are the others as well. The Minister of Housing is here. He still hasn't given the municipalities any figures yet in terms of what it's going to cost, the social housing transfer of $905 million, or how that's going to be divided. What's very interesting about that is the fact that some municipalities have a lot of social housing and others don't have any at all, and it's happened all over Ontario. Does that mean that those municipalities where the social housing is located, which maybe didn't want the social housing in the first place — which I think is regrettable. Having been involved with this for many years, I think social housing has done a lot of good in a lot of communities. But some communities have it and some don't. Does that mean that only those communities where the social housing is located are the ones that have to pay

for it on an ongoing basis, a system in which basically they had very little say about whether it should be in their municipality or had very little knowledge about the projects themselves?

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The other one, of course, is public health. As a matter of fact, just about every health unit in the province that I'm aware of, certainly the local one in the Kingston area, is very concerned over the fact that here we have all the health services in the province looked after through the Ministry of Health. We've got this one health service, public health, that is now going to be paid for entirely with local municipal dollars, and let me tell you the history of that.

Just about the same time, 25 years ago, when each local municipality had its own little health department, when the assessment function was taken over by the province, guess what? The enlightened province of the day also realized that if public health was going to be consistently applied throughout the entire province, they were going to have to have a much larger say in the whole situation and they took over control of the situation. I think after that, the cost-sharing arrangement was 80% by the province and 20% by the local municipality. That was done in order to ensure that there was a level of consistency of services throughout Ontario.

What are you doing now? You're downloading the only health service I'm aware of back on to the local taxpayers when just about every expert has told you that it's the wrong thing to do. It is wrong to do that with social services, health care services, the kinds of services where you really don't know because of epidemics, because of runs on welfare etc, what your total budget is or what your total financial outlay is going to be from year to year. You're going to put that on the local property taxpayer, which is basically a tax system which cannot react very quickly to changing circumstances. That's the reason why they don't want you to do that and just about every expert has told you that.

What are you doing? You're downloading that on to the local municipalities. You're going to have different standards in different parts of Ontario depending upon whether or not a particular council in that area feels that health care, public health, is an important issue to them, and if it isn't, with a lot of councils, I can tell you, if the squeeze comes between paying for those hard-core services like roads and snow removal and that sort of thing and the soft services like public health and social services, the soft services are going to suffer and you'll have different standards across the province.

You can, through your Ministry of Health, publish provincial guidelines and that sort of thing, but in the long run you do not have the power to enforce them any more. Do you know why? You've also taken away the municipal support program on which many municipalities relied because it was the equalizer between the poor municipalities and the richer municipalities to make sure that some basic core services were available in different municipalities regardless of whether or not they were able to get that money through their own local taxation. That was the whole idea behind that. The idea was to provide some kind of level of services.

The municipal support grant payments are gone. As the minister said the other day, two or three years ago it was $1.3 billion or $1.2 billion, then it was cut to $667 million and now it's going to be gone. You're going to have much less control over local municipalities. There are going to be a lot fewer provincial standards.

Then we have the ultimate bribe. That's the only way to put it, but it's still parliamentary. Look it up. It is a bribe where roads are being handed over to the local municipalities, sections of highways in those municipalities, and they're being told that as of January 1, 1998, they are local roads: "You look after them. By the way, here we're giving you money." As the minister said the other day, "We're giving you $1 million or $2 million to pay for one year," I believe he said, "of upkeep and some more money for small renovations somewhere down the road."

I'll tell you what's going to happen in most municipalities. In most municipalities they're going to take that money and they're going to pay for next year's services because next year in most municipalities property taxes are going to go up. They've got this pot of $1 million or $2 million, and rather than putting that aside until the road needs to be reconstructed, that money is going to be used up. So three or four years down the road, when you need a major reconstruction of that particular road that used to be a provincial road, the money won't be available.

Why do you think the Ministry of Transportation was such a big player in road reconstruction in any municipality? I believe on any major road they usually paid somewhere between 75% to 80% of the money. Why do you think that was so? I'll tell you why it was so. Because the local municipal tax base couldn't afford some of those projects on their own. They couldn't, so the Ministry of Transportation over the years got more and more involved. They had to approve those projects, obviously; they were paying 75% to 80%. Depending upon what kind of a road it was, they paid 75% to 80%, so they ultimately called the shot.

I can tell you that as a local councillor you didn't often appreciate it when the ministry said: "No, that's not a high priority. We prefer to do that road in the other municipality this year. It's a higher priority." If you were from the first municipality that in effect was being cut out of the system for that particular year, you usually didn't feel very good. On the other hand, you knew you had a chance at those capital subsidy dollars and that you were going to get that major road work done at some point in time.

With the system you're setting up of downloading all of these roads, in three, four or 10 years from now when those roads need to be rebuilt, local municipalities simply will not have the ability, the financial capacity to raise enough money on their own to do that kind of thing. That's why the province was always involved in major capital projects in different municipalities, for the simple reason that they couldn't afford to do them by themselves.

There may be one or two fast-growing municipalities that will be able to do that. I'll grant you that much. Maybe in Mississauga, maybe in Markham, maybe in some of those places where there's been real economic growth and where a lot of businesses are moving in that may be possible, but for the vast majority of communities and municipalities in this province that simply will not be possible.

Getting back to the time allocation motion and what you're really doing, and I will wind up because my colleagues in the NDP undoubtedly want to say something as well and I've only got a few more minutes left: The time allocation motion on such an important piece of legislation, according to your own speeches here in the House today and other speeches you've made earlier, is simply too important a piece of legislation to ram through this House.

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Centre): I agree.

Mr Gerretsen: You agree.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): Very undemocratic.

Mr Gerretsen: It's very, very undemocratic. I guess what bothers me more than anything is this notion that about once a week or sometimes twice a week we have these motions in the House.

Mr Newman: Oh, come on.

Mr Gerretsen: Oh, yes, we have. We've already had it eight or nine times over the last seven or eight months. On every major bill it seems to go that way.

What we're really telling the people of Ontario is that when you elect a member to come to Queen's Park and he wants to say something, particularly about an important piece of legislation — which is severely limited in the amount of time we can say it in anyway because it's only 10 minutes per speech now, other than on motions like this — what you're telling your own constituents is: "We don't want to hear from every member in the House even though they may have something to add. After a certain period of time we want to say: 'That's it. We're going to ram this piece of legislation through whether you like it or not.'"

Do you know something? The more often you do it, the more acceptable it becomes to the general public, and that is a real shame. It shouldn't happen that way.

Interjections.

Mr Gerretsen: Mr Speaker, can you get some order here?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The Chair recognizes the member for Nepean on a point of order.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): Mr Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent for the member for Scarborough North to make a statement committing the Liberal government never to bring in time allocation.

1700

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Gerretsen: First of all, I appreciate the confidence the member for Nepean has in the members of the opposition if he realizes too that the days of this government are numbered and that within two years we will have a compassionate, sensitive Liberal government in Ontario again, a government that will truly balance the rights of individuals, groups and communities in this province, not a government whose prime motivation — sorry, I can't talk about motivation — whose prime purpose is to give a tax cut to those individuals who least need it. Let's never forget what these various bills are about, whether we're talking about the cuts to health care, whether we're talking about the cuts to education, whether we're talking about municipal downloading, whether we're talking about the 50% cut —

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I realize it's Thursday afternoon and you're all wanting to get out of here. If you're in a hurry to get out, leave. Take my word for it, just leave. But if you're going to be in here, then you must go by the rules in here. Please, I want to hear the speaker's speech.

Mr Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, because I'm sure you want to hear this as well. The people of Ontario are interested in good government, and they know this government is basically concerned about just giving a tax cut to those people who least need it. Let's never forget that for somebody who makes $25,000, as a result of your tax cut that person gets something like $200 back a year; if somebody is making about $50,000, they get back about $500 a year; but if you're in the $100,000 range, you might get back $4,000 or $5,000. That's really what this is all about.

If you were just interested in balancing the budget and cutting the deficit of this province as low as possible, I would have no problem with it all, but you are handing money back to people when you haven't even got a balanced budget. It's amazing that this is the government of the business party, that believes in running this province in a businesslike fashion.

Mr Shea: And it's their money. This isn't Kingston, John.

The Acting Speaker: The member for High Park-Swansea, come to order.

Mr Gerretsen: What's happening is that they are driving the public debt in this province up from $100 billion to $120 billion when at the same time they're giving tax cuts to people.

I see that my colleague the member for Oakwood has arrived. I believe there are only 10 minutes left on the clock. I want to give others an opportunity to speak about this as well. I believe the rules allow for a sharing of the 60 minutes between members of caucuses, so I now yield the floor to my colleague the member for Oakwood.

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): As you know, this bill is complementary to Bill 106, which brings about quite a fundamental change in taxation in Ontario, and it especially affects Metro. As you know, the Conservative Party in Metro ran for years on the principle, on the policy — they went door to door in June 1995 saying: "We are against market value. The Conservatives will never bring in market value."

What they've done with Bill 106 and this bill is that they've introduced something they said they wouldn't do. This, for all intents and purposes, is a variation of market value assessment. It's based on the market value of your property, which fluctuates with the economic cycles, with the real estate cycles. That's what is being adopted here. That is what is being reinforced, in essence: something they emphatically said they would never introduce if they were elected. What did they do? As soon as they got into power they introduced something they promised door to door they would never do.

Sure there is a need to change and reform the property tax system, but this is the system they said they would never introduce because it was wrong in principle. The Conservatives opposed market value certainly in Metro. They swore up and down they would never do it because they knew what it would do: It would subject a lot of people in Metropolitan Toronto to fluctuations in real estate. Toronto real estate prices fluctuate constantly. Those real estate prices, once they're linked into your property tax, mean that you, who could be a homeowner, who may be out of work, have no control over the property taxes you pay. So you could be unemployed and the value of your property goes through the roof and you have to pay higher taxes. You're sitting in your home on a piece of property and you've got no income coming in, yet your taxes will go up.

It's got nothing to do with your ability to pay. All it has to do with is speculation in the marketplace, the real estate market in the neighbourhood you live in. You're constantly under that pressure and it's very acute in Toronto. It may not happen as much in rural areas, but in Toronto it happens periodically and it happens regularly. In other words, we could be in a situation where all of a sudden, because the neighbourhood becomes hot, the value of that property goes very high, and that pensioner is on a fixed income. That pensioner will now have to pay exorbitant property taxes and it's not because of anything they've done. Their income is the same. Now they're going to have to pay market-value-based property taxes, and that hurts. Maybe people with a lot of money are not that affected, but people on fixed incomes, people on marginal incomes are going to be affected by this type of system.

This system also doesn't wipe away one of the greatest inequities there is with this market type of system. That is, if you renovate, improve your property, automatically you're still going to get higher taxes because you do that. In other words, if you've got a moderate home that you fix up, the value of that property could increase because you've invested in that home. What this system of market value does — I don't know what they call it; they've changed the name three or four times, actual value, market value — it means is that if you fix up your home, you're going to be hit with a tax increase. So here you've got a person who moves into an older part of Toronto, fixes up their home, puts $100,000 into a new kitchen and bathroom and the tax collector is going to come along and say, "Hey, your taxes are going to go up." Your assessment is higher because you've fixed up your home.

That is one of the big penalty clauses in this type of market value property tax system, which they've introduced all across Ontario. Sure, on paper it looks great. All the accountants will sit down and say, "This is fair." Yes, it's fair to those who are sitting in their ivory towers. What about those pensioners who are sitting in those homes they don't want to move out of? Those are homes they may have through marriage or through family. They don't want to move anywhere. They have a moderate income or perhaps they haven't had any income for a number of years. This system is going to punish those people.

All it will enable them to do is basically try and seek redress from the municipality, and what the municipality will do with this bill is basically put a lien on the property so they can defer some of the taxes. What pensioner wants a mortgage on their property when they spent their whole life trying to get rid of the mortgage? This gives them a mortgage on their property after maybe 40 or 50 years of working to unload a mortgage. This is the reprieve it gives pensioners. This is certainly going to hurt sections of Metropolitan Toronto that have been stable neighbourhoods.

With these fluctuations you're going to see certain people forced to leave their homes, and it's because of this unasked-for property tax system about which the people of Metropolitan Toronto in certain areas said, "Before you do it, at least give us the impact studies to show what this would mean to my street or neighbourhood." The Minister of Municipal Affairs said: "No, I don't have it. I gave it to the Minister of Finance." He says: "No, no, I don't have it. They're secret cabinet documents." Property tax figures are secret cabinet documents.

A person living on a street in Toronto or in East York or in Scarborough couldn't find out the impact of these bills, 106 and this one here, because of government secrecy. They refuse to release the impact studies to show how much the taxes would go up on every street. You know why they wouldn't release them? They knew that if citizens saw what would happen to their taxes on certain streets, they would be in tax revolt. So they've kept those figures from the public. They've kept those tax figures, secret documents, ordinary tax numbers they have at the Ministry of Finance — they have three studies, or probably more — from the public because they know that if the public were to find out in certain areas of Metropolitan Toronto what would happen to their property taxes, there would be a tax revolt. So the government has gotten away with withholding information from the public. That's why there isn't a tax revolt, because they were able to connive and keep those figures away from the public.

1710

When the public sees these assessments come in, in certain neighbourhoods taxes may come down, but I will tell you that there have been thousands of successful appeals, where most of the people who would get reductions have already had them. My colleague from Yorkview will tell you that. I've done it. People have reduced their taxes, so all that's left is a lot of people who are going to have higher taxes because of this. There are

literally tens of thousands of people who have already appealed successfully. Their taxes are going to be at approximately 1996 values. All there is left is for people's taxes to go up.

That's why this government has hidden those figures and those stats, and that's why I see members sitting across from me who for years opposed this kind of market value system in Metro. As I said, in the June election this government swore that the worst thing in the world was the market value type of system. If you look at it, what's the difference from this system that they call actual value or average value? There's no difference. It is market value. That's what they're imposing and that's what they're doing despite the fact that they said for years a Conservative government would never do it.

You're going to see homes all across Metro where people who are living in stable neighbourhoods with limited income and people even on reasonable incomes are going to be hit. It's not fair, especially when you don't even release the impact studies which give them an opportunity to find out what they're getting into. But this government will never release those studies because they know they are dynamite and they're dangerous and they would have a revolt on their hands. They never have and never will.

This is the beginning of market value assessment in Toronto. It's going to help a few, but I'll tell you, over the years it's going to hurt a lot of people, because they're going to be subject to speculation in the marketplace.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Interjections.

Mr Wildman: I'm sorry to interrupt this conversation. Speaker, earlier you admonished the members across the way to settle down. You said that perhaps it's Thursday afternoon and people wanted to get home and wanted to get out of here, and that you wanted to hear the debate. I appreciate that. I think we do, unfortunately, have evidence that the government does want to get going in moving things through because they want to get out of here.

I hate to announce this to the House, and I sincerely dislike the idea of having to announce this, but the government House leader has introduced another time allocation motion on another piece of legislation while we're just debating this one. That time allocation motion relates to Bill 160, the education bill. I'm not going to talk about that bill, but I want to put the time allocation motion that we're debating on Bill 149, the so-called Fair Municipal Finance Act, in the context of this other one.

The government House leader, when he introduced this motion for debate today, said this was about the eighth time — I think he said it was the eighth time — the government had used this strategy. He compared it favourably to other governments. But he didn't indicate at any time that it was going to become standard practice, that this was going to be the way the government proceeds, that they were going to move time allocation motions on every piece of legislation that was of any significance in the House.

One of the excuses, and I use that word advisedly, for the rule changes was to avoid this kind of thing, to make it possible to have debate, which is what this assembly is for, to ensure that as many members as possible on all sides of the House could participate in debate on important issues, important pieces of legislation, and to avoid these kinds of measures. That was one of the arguments that the members of the government caucus put forward in the debate around rule changes. And yet now, with these new rules, we still end up with the government moving these kinds of motions on every important piece of legislation. It really is disappointing.

I didn't support the rule changes. I thought they went too far in limiting debate. But the government said that they had an agenda they had to get through, they wanted to move things as quickly as possible through the legislative process, and they needed changes in the rules in order to do that.

Having had these rule changes, I want to point out that on Bill 149 we haven't had particularly extended debate. We've had three days of debate on second reading. On Bill 160, we haven't even had that much yet. And yet we keep getting these motions.

Since the government doesn't seem to move these motions early at second reading debate, but usually waits for a couple of days, I can only conclude that the main reason the government House leader is continuing to use time allocation even though he has these new rules to assist him in his job is because he wants to limit public input. The time allocation motion essentially limits committee. It limits the amount of time for committee and it limits the travel of committee, because of course if you don't have enough time, you can't do a lot of travelling.

It also, unfortunately, has the effect of limiting real consideration of legislation and improvement of legislation based on public input. All of these time allocation motions essentially set forward one day for clause-by-clause debate, and they all say that at 5 pm the committee can continue to sit; however, they cannot have further debate. All of the amendments are deemed to have been put, and all the committee members can do is vote on those amendments.

I understand that on a number of the time allocation motions, including Bill 136, there have been a number of situations where all members of the committee, government party members, Liberal Party members and NDP members, agreed there was a section or there were a couple of sections of the bill that needed improvement, but because of the time allocation motion, the Chair of the committee could not accept, even with unanimous consent of the committee, amendments that would improve the bill. So as I said, it appears that the purpose of this is for public input, amendment and improvement to the legislation, to be limited.

1720

What this means is that the only amendments that can be dealt with are government amendments. Sure, you can have opposition amendments submitted, but if there isn't time for proper debate about those amendments and if they

are deemed at 5 o'clock to have been put and no further discussion can take place, automatically the government majority on the committee will defeat those amendments. Ironically, as I said, on those few occasions when all members of the committee, no matter what their political stripe, have agreed that there is a provision that needs to be improved, because of the time allocation motion the hands of the Chair of the committee, all the members of committee, are tied and they cannot even improve the bill in a way that all members support. I don't understand why government members find that acceptable. I certainly wouldn't if I were in their position.

It's been said in debate that the more often this is done, the easier it becomes. I suppose it could be argued that if the government intends to use time allocation on every bill that they consider to be important, then we should go back to the old rules. Why do we need the new rules? I don't understand why. The government's going to time-allocate everything.

Mr Turnbull: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think it would be certainly useful in this debate, in view of the comments that my learned colleague from Algoma is making, if he could perhaps comment on the fact that I recall when they were the government they brought in time allocation —

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Wildman: I do appreciate the intervention of my good friend from York Mills; however, I was just alluding to the fact that the government members, including I think the member for York Mills, in a debate on rule changes said that things should change and that this approach was not acceptable. The government members argued that they had had to use time allocation motions when they didn't want to and that the new rules were going to make it possible for them to get legislation through without doing this.

I guess it means that even in the world of speedup under the new rules where every time an important piece of legislation is put forward for debate in the House there is the noise, the atmosphere of a train station, with the diesel engines revving up and the locomotives getting ready —and boy, they take off and they move quickly, and they move quickly through second reading. But even that's not fast enough for this government. Once they get second reading done over two or three days, then they've got to move a time allocation motion, not because they want to limit the debate by members in this assembly but because they want to limit public input into the legislation.

The government does not want to hear contrary opinion. The government does not want to have committees travelling the province, or even committees in Toronto, while the House sits that might attract people who have input to make who don't agree with the government. I know it is a nuisance to have to listen to people who disagree. It can be quite disagreeable to have to listen to people who put forward views that are not shared by the majority in the committee. It does take some patience and it must try the patience of the members of the government, because so many of them know in their heart of hearts that they are right, both with a capital R and with a small r, that their position is correct, beyond doubt.

I think one of my friends in this House once quoted Jesse Helms. I never thought I'd be quoting the great Senator. When asked to describe the new neo-conservative members of Congress who were recently elected, he once said something to the effect of, "You know them boys, they're sometimes wrong but they're never in doubt." That's what we have here, a government where they're often wrong but they're never in doubt.

If you're sure that you're right, then obviously those who disagree are wrong and why should you waste time listening to people with incorrect opinions? It's just a waste of time.

Some might argue that in a democracy it's important to hear all opinions, that it's important to listen to even the most bizarrely presented views because, after all, citizens in a democracy have the right to hold those views and to present them. Some might argue in a democracy it makes sense to try and persuade those who disagree of the rightness of your position. But if you don't have time, you don't have the desire to listen and to try and discuss and persuade, then it's better to run the railroad and to move time allocation so you don't have to waste the time of the committee listening.

The problem with that approach, I believe sincerely, is that even on pieces of legislation with which you agree, those who draft legislation sometimes make mistakes. Often, if you have proper input into legislation from the public, they can point out those errors and that can lead to amendment that will improve the legislation, make it work better for the public and for society, but this government doesn't have time for that.

So if there are amendments that have been presented, they are all deemed to have been put and there's no time after 5 o'clock to debate them on the fifth calendar day following the final day of consideration referred to in this motion. They're deemed to have been put, and all the committee can do is vote on them. So even if the committee members discover a provision that needs to be changed, they can't change it. That's a terrible position to put a committee into, and it's an untenable position for a Chair of committee.

Maybe it's unfair of me to quote Mr Helms, because on those couple of occasions where the government members as well as the opposition have discovered provisions that need change, they did have at least a glimmer of doubt about the rightness of the drafting of the legislation.

This bill does what many other bills of this government have done in that it subverts the language. The very name of the bill carries nominative aspects, in that it is called the Fair Municipal Finance Act. Obviously fairness, just as rightness, is in the eye and the ear of the beholder or the listener. You can't pass a law that makes everything fair. You can pass a law that attempts to do that and may or may not be effective, but it isn't automatic that simply by passing a law things are going to be fair.

1730

By making errors and not having proper drafting and time to listen and to hear what the people have to say, you may in fact make things more unfair.

There's no question that there was need in this province for change in the way we assess properties, to try to get rid of some of the disparities between different types of properties and properties within municipalities or between different municipalities.

These things are not easy. I know that the member for St Andrew-St Patrick, who spoke in this debate earlier and explained the government's point of view with regard to Bill 149, when she was running for election said she opposed this kind of change. She put out a pamphlet to her prospective constituents and said she was opposed to market value assessment.

The government doesn't like to call this market value assessment. They call it actual value assessment. But what's in a name? The fact is, this is market value assessment by some other name. There isn't any difference.

I respect the fact that the member for St Andrew-St Patrick in her role as parliamentary assistant has gotten up and has explained what the legislation is about. She didn't explain why we needed a time allocation motion and why we needed to move it forward more quickly than it was progressing through the House without the time allocation motion, but she did put forward the arguments about the bill. I didn't hear in her remarks why she has changed her view, why this is now good for her constituents when in June 1995 it wasn't.

The fact is that we are, I believe, moving too quickly. I believe there are going to be terrible foul-ups. I believe things are going to be indeed more unfair. It's a tremendous job to reassess every property in this province, and to do it in the time frame that this government is putting forward is completely unreasonable.

My leader, in talking about this bill in the House, indicated that they were going to have drive-by assessments, that the government is now hiring a lot of inexperienced people who I'm sure want to do a good job but who do not have experience, and they're going to give them — how long training?

Mr Pouliot: Like a day.

Mr Wildman: A day or something. They're going to get a day's training or something like that, and then they're going to be sent out to reassess communities and the properties in those communities. Three thousand assessors?

Mr Pouliot: No, 3.8 million to be assessed.

Mr Wildman: Yes, 3.8 million to be assessed in values. This has the potential for a horrendous botch-up. There are going to be many, many appeals.

Why does it have to be rushed? I guess you can ask that question about just about everything this government is doing. The restructuring they are proposing for municipalities and for school boards in the province all has to be in place in a few months, about 90 days.

There's a municipal election this fall. Nobody who is thinking about running in this municipal election, for whatever office, knows what kind of budgets they're going to have, has any idea of what kind of revenues they're going to have, of what is going to happen to property taxes. Nobody knows.

Suddenly, they're going to be thrown into office in the new year and they're going to have to be able to put together a coherent budget when everything is going to be up in the air.

The fact is that we're seeing this bill as part of a much larger restructuring that this government is doing in too much of a hurry. There is absolutely no reason, if this government wanted to do the restructuring, that it had to be done for this municipal election. It could have been done over a three-year period and come into effect in the next municipal election, and it could have then been done right, in a considered, thoughtful, step-by-step manner, instead of the rush.

I think I know why the government wants to do it so quickly: They want to do it because they have to get the money out. They are trying to download as much as they can to the municipal sector, as many costs as possible, so that they can get less expenditure on the provincial side so that they can fund their income tax cut for the top 10% of income earners in the province. That's the reason. That's why they couldn't wait until the next municipal election, because that would probably be after the next provincial election. That's the reason.

So we're going to have a tremendous mess at the municipal level, property taxes are going to go sky high and this contingency fund, which every minister who has anything to do with the municipal level of government and the download has spent many times over already, nobody yet knows how anybody can access that fund.

In my area, just the download of provincial highways to the municipal level of government and the download of Ontario Provincial Police services will more than take all of the share that those municipalities have of that contingency fund, and that doesn't count any of the social services and other services that the municipalities are going to be asked to shoulder.

In my area, the estimate from the Ontario Provincial Police for the OPP service is $450 per household, on average. That's the average. The highest, in the township of Day and Bright Additional, a very small township in the east end of my riding, near Blind River, is $750 per household. The total bill in that municipality for OPP services is higher than the total municipal budget, excluding education, in 1996, just for OPP services. What this means is an enormous skyrocket in property taxes and a tremendous amount of uncertainty and dislocation at the municipal level of government. The property taxes are going to go way high, and property taxpayers are going to pay for it.

There is absolutely no excuse for this government to be rushing this through with a time allocation motion. Why doesn't the government do it right? Why don't they listen to the municipal politicians, the taxpayers' coalitions, the property taxpayers from local municipalities? Why don't

they travel the province, hear what people have to say and do it in a reasonable fashion?

It's a truism that things done quickly often cause problems. The government here believes, I know, that bigger is better, that amalgamations are the way we should go. I don't believe necessarily that bigger is better, coming from a rural area, but if you're going to do it, do it right. Don't rush it through with time allocation motions. Don't take every significant piece of legislation that has to be passed in this House and time-allocate it so we don't hear from the public, so they don't have an opportunity to make their views known and the members of this House don't have the opportunity to respond to the views of the public and to amend legislation, at least to do it right.

I will be sharing my time with my friend from Lake Nipigon, who will make the rest of the presentation for our caucus.

1740

Mr Pouliot: I wish to commend my distinguished colleague who's been in the House for 22 years and who has mentioned on many occasions that never did he imagine that one day — well, the past two and a half years — he would work with people with such determination, such zeal, prone to mistakes, people in a hurry.

Time allocation is the order of the day, the subject matter being addressed. By this time, views on time allocation, on gag orders, on handcuff motions from the present government should be completely exhausted, for it has become practice, the method of this government, to silence the opposition, to silence the potential contribution of the taxpayers, of the general public. One more time they've imposed their will on the minority of opposition members. It is becoming a weekly occurrence. Once you wish to help the government as a parliamentarian, as a representative of people in your riding, almost inevitably you should expect to be shackled, to be muzzled, whatever it takes to impose their silence.

Once you reach the committee, what they cannot do in the House they shall do at committee, where they control, by way of their relentless majority, the regulations, the amendments, the will of the government. To a person, committee members have been told to readily acquiesce, because what we have is the master puppeteer, the puppets and the shadow puppets who will comply, and comply at once, or else. Consequently, we're left with very little to say.

We're not just talking about any bill, any law which is about to be. This is of a consequence, of a magnitude seldom presented to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. No matter where you live, no matter how you live in Ontario, it is virtually impossible to bypass the impact of what is about to happen. This is the ultimate. This is the mother lode of dumping, of abdicating one's responsibility, of transferring the pay-for-service responsibility to others. This is big time. This is the limit.

The threshold is about to hit your community. Social services will now be, in large part, the financial responsibility of municipalities. More than 800 municipalities, villages, hamlets, unorganized territories will suffer the severe impact of what is about to happen. How much will it cost? Well, we're less than three months before the clouds get so very low, in fact, in some cases, if I may be so bold, before all hell breaks loose, and the government has refused to this day, October 2, 1997 — keep in mind January 1 is when you meet your destiny, when you start paying for all those additional services — to share impact studies with the general public. It has been adamant about releasing the true cost of services.

Also, I wish you to keep in mind that we have the school board and municipal elections the same day, in November, next month. One of the tragedies of this exercise is that many people who would have sought re-election, people with experience at councils — mayors, reeves, council people — have decided not to seek nominations, not to run again, simply because they don't need the kind of mess that is about to descend on their municipalities. Only three days of debate? Not a lot.

The government is in a rush, and when you're tired and when you are rushed, you make mistakes. Look at the amendments. They come and face us by the dozen. Every aspect of the bill is being amended. You can hardly recognize the first draft, the legalese. The people who work at the ministry look very tired indeed because they have to respond in a hurry to the orders of the commissars. They come up with volumes. The paper industry is doing very well in northern Ontario because it's draft after draft after draft, a litany, a continuity of incompetence, of mistakes. You confuse people a lot when you don't know. Because you are in a rush, you don't know what you're doing.

It's less than three months before you pay the bill and they won't tell you what the bill will be. They have 3.8 million units across Ontario being assessed. It's never been done. It's never been seen before. It's the largest assessment and reassessment exercise ever undertaken, not only in Ontario, not only in Canada, but in North America. Some 600,000 units will be appealed. People in the ministry tell us that.

What a mess we're in. It could have been avoided if these proposed laws, these bills, were debated for longer periods of time, because they're consequential; they're very impacting. We need more time. We need to listen better and we need to make some counterproposals.

But you see, this government does not operate that way. The democratic way is only respected or best respected when you have Democracy Incorporated — Democracy Inc or Democracy Ltd — then you might have a break. Otherwise you have to comply. "Out of the way. I shall have my way."

You've heard many qualifications. Some have gone perhaps too far when they've mentioned that the government is dictatorial, that this unit, this body, this ensemble resembles tragedies of yesteryear, that they will dictate their will. I don't entirely share views that are that extreme. What I begin to understand is that not only are they a difficult lot to work with but they don't communicate all that well.

The people of Ontario are saying there's less than three months to go. Like my good friend from Algoma said, where is the cost factor? We're supposed to get the costs on October 6, next week. Someone, I presume the minister, will fax all municipalities and say, "This is what the cost of Ontario Provincial Police will be for your municipality."

1750

Some people will disagree. They have different sets of figures. But as is the case nowadays, the government says, "This is the cost," and we pay. Then they will say, "What's the cost of social housing?" Then you will get another fax and you're supposed to agree. It will be foolproof. We know if it's anything like drafting the legislation, it will be chaotic. There will be quite a mess there.

Assuming that the costs are right on some items and you agree with them, because that's what it costs, who will make up the shortcomings? Who will pay? Will the same minister send you a cheque, or will your council ask you to fork over, to shell out more money through your residential taxes?

Member after member on the government side earlier this afternoon talked about the small business community and how many jobs had been created, and that they will benefit, and benefit a lot, by the endeavours of Bill 149, the downloading of responsibility and money on the shoulders of municipalities. But I did not hear one member of the government saying they will keep paying 100% of school taxes. Residential levels will get a bit of a reprieve, but then the cost of OPP alone — the commercial sector, the big ones, will be okay, because they get the business occupancy tax, the BOT, taken out, so they get a break. So on top of the downloading, because of the class differences that are in Bill 149, there will be further dislocation.

Municipalities will be left with the following choices: Hit the residential homeowner and/or the small business people, because this exercise will result in a $1-billion shifting. Oh, you will have a contingency fund, but it will not be nearly enough to pick up the losses. There is an imbalance here and you will be asked to face it. People will say, "We don't have the money to pay for these services."

Up north, in our special part of Ontario, we are more vulnerable and we're more prone to some dislocation. Our figures estimate that the downloading will cost the north $282 million, and that's not factoring in the highway responsibility which looms large, the added burden. That's $282 million. Will the minister of the crown stand up in his place today and say: "It will not be so. We will send you a cheque to make up the difference so that your small business and property taxes will not go up by leaps and bounds"?

In northern Ontario, our special part of the north, we're resource-based. We pay for the freight big time so they can enjoy a very good standard of living in other parts of the province and the country. Some $480.47, that's what the cost per household will be when all is said and done. In the south it's $105.32. This is what our research shows. On top of that, you have to factor in a percentage for the unknown — Murphy's law. In some cases that will indeed be devastating. You also have to add to it the unconditional grants. That is eliminated.

Mr Wildman: And the farm tax.

Mr Pouliot: And the farm tax, like my good friend from Algoma says. What you save on the farm, you will pay on the house. Make no bones about it, there are no free lunches. There's no secret. It's simple mathematics.

The Premier — I don't know — one day gets up and says, "When all is said and done, we should be able to save anywhere from 5% to 10% at the residential level," the municipal taxes that you pay. It's okay for him to say that because it's you who should be better managers. "Oh, I'm a good manager," says Mike Harris. "Every hour of every day, I borrow. I spend more money than I take in."

This is a recovery of some proportion, of some importance. It should be this way, except they made the mistake of not paying down the mortgage. As the money kept rolling in, they just detoured; they transferred the money to honour the commitment which is the big tax break.

This is what it's all about again: $1 billion coming out of education, $1 billion coming out of municipalities. You have to reach by instalments $5 billion per year, because that's what the tax break is, and at the same time you have to reconcile the debts that you have accumulated. You will by the time you leave office have increased the provincial debt by more than $25 billion during boom times.

Is this good management? It could have been avoided if you had paid down the mortgage, paid down the debt, in lieu of the tax break. It makes no sense to me and it makes no sense to you. And I'm not factoring in Ontario Hydro, which will have to borrow another $10 billion because of the mess you left us in. Simply put, $35 billion more, an economic sin of the highest order: a government that should be judged so harshly, a government that missed one of the great opportunities during good times to put some money aside.

I know you read the scriptures, Speaker. I know that you've often quoted about the good years and the bad years, and you told me yesterday, "For it is written." Do you think you and I could have the scriptures read by the Minister of Finance and the Premier of this province so that they can at least spiritually arm themselves better when dealing with the challenges they are faced with? It should be rewarding times, not times of agony, another legacy that you leave for tomorrow, for the year after and for the generations to come. They'll have to foot the bill for this kind of incompetence.

We're not only offended, but we begin to see a sense of repetition, that every time a bill is jeopardized, when we wish to help the government with commonsensical counterdrafting, every time they move closure on us. The government House leader, who is present right now, present today, takes a great deal of pride standing at his post and making sure that democracy ceases to exist a little more.

We wish to debate for more than three days when it comes to Bill 149. Three short days surely does not

suffice. Surely the next time we shall have better fortune, better luck, surely if the people we represent stand up and tell the government: "Look, you don't know what you're doing. Therefore I know little of where I'm going, but it shall cost more."

It being 6 of the clock, Mr Speaker, I understand that you will be asked to conduct a most important vote on this closure. I will finish my remarks.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Johnson has moved government notice of motion number 48. Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1800 to 1805.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): All those in favour please rise one at a time until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Johnson, David	Saunderson, William
Bassett, Isabel	Klees, Frank	Shea, Derwyn
Brown, Jim	Leach, Al	Sheehan, Frank
Carroll, Jack	Marland, Margaret	Snobelen, John
Chudleigh, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Spina, Joseph
Clement, Tony	Maves, Bart	Sterling, Norman W.
DeFaria, Carl	Mushinski, Marilyn	Stewart, R. Gary
Ecker, Janet	Newman, Dan	Tascona, Joseph N.
Flaherty, Jim	O'Toole, John	Tilson, David
Ford, Douglas B.	Parker, John L.	Turnbull, David
Froese, Tom	Rollins, E.J. Douglas	Wood, Bob
Galt, Doug	Sampson, Rob	Young, Terence H.
Hastings, John		

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Pouliot, Gilles
Christopherson, David	Laughren, Floyd	Ruprecht, Tony
Colle, Mike	Lessard, Wayne	Sergio, Mario
Cordiano, Joseph	Marchese, Rosario	Silipo, Tony
Curling, Alvin	Martel, Shelley	Wildman, Bud

Clerk Assistant: The ayes are 37; the nays are 15.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the resolution passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I have the weekly business statement for the week of October 6, 1997.

Monday, October 6: Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act.

Tuesday, October 7: Bill 158, the Education Voting Rights Act; and Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act.

On Wednesday, October 8: There's an opposition day for the NDP; in addition, Bill 128, the child support guidelines; Bill 102, the Community Safety Act. There's also a series of government process simplification acts, otherwise known as the red tape: Bill 61, from the Ministry of the Attorney General; Bill 63, from the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation; Bill 64, from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations; Bill 65, from the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism; Bill 66, from the Ministry of Environment and Energy; Bill 67, from the Ministry of Health; Bill 68, from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines; and Bill 69, from the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services.

Thursday, October 2: private members' public business, ballot items 103 and 104; Bill 99, the Workers' Compensation Reform Act.

Interjections.

Hon David Johnson: Why I am getting all this heckling?

Private bills on Thursday as well: Pr65, the Hamilton act; Pr78, the Scarborough act; Pr84, the Japanese Canadian Cultural Association of Metropolitan Toronto. Then there's a series of red tape reduction acts: Bill 114, from the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation; Bill 115, from the Ministry of Finance; Bill 116, from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Bill 117, from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations; Bill 118, from the Ministry of Health; Bill 119, from the Ministry of Natural Resources; Bill 120, from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines; Bill 121, from the Ministry of Environment and Energy; Bill 122, from the Ministry of the Attorney General. Finally on Thursday, after that, the House calendar motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): It being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Monday, October 6.

The House adjourned at 1811.

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Wayne Wettlaufer, Terence H. Young
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Speaker
Honourable Chris Stockwell

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Chris Stockwell

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 6 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 6 octobre 1997

The House met at 1332.

Prayers.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe that at the time you made a ruling with respect to members in the House wearing buttons that had messages on them, you said there would be occasions on which, with unanimous consent, members of the House could honour certain days or celebrations.

Yesterday of course was World Teachers' Day and the button I'm showing here is the button in celebration of World Teachers' Day, which talks about how public education works. I would like to ask unanimous consent for the members of the Legislature to be able to proudly wear this button in support of World Teachers' Day.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): The member for Beaches-Woodbine requests unanimous consent to wear the button for World Teachers Day. Agreed? I heard a no.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGE

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph): On a point of privilege, Speaker: It's been brought to my attention that remarks I made in the House last Tuesday may have been misinterpreted. It's important for me to clarify the record. It was not my intention to indicate to the House that teachers in my riding are supportive of Bill 160 and I regret any confusion that may have been caused in this regard.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CASINO GAMBLING

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): Due to the government's objection, I'll have to remove my button in commemoration of World Teachers' Day.

I stand today to give a statement of support by my leader Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal caucus to the Coalition Against a Casino in Timmins.

The Coalition Against a Casino in Timmins is composed of a growing number of local clubs, associations, charities, churches, along with some representatives of local counselling services and concerned citizens. The main objective of the coalition is solely to stop the government's plan to open a seasonal casino in the community of Timmins. Many Timmins citizens are also expressing concerns about the social problems related to casino gambling activities.

"One person standing behind the coalition, who has been publicly opposed to a casino from day one, is Timmins Mayor Vic Power. 'They certainly have my support,' said Power.... 'There's nothing positive about a casino,' said Power. 'There's the damage it does to the family, society and even our outlook on life.'"

With the support of the citizens of the municipality of Timmins, we add our voice to the coalition. In their words, "Our coalition intends to unite forces and take all the necessary actions to prevent the opening of any casino in the city with a heart of gold."

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): I can't tell you how shocked I am that the government members would refuse unanimous consent to wear a button in this House that celebrates World Teachers' Day.

I shouldn't be shocked, not after listening to the debate last week and hearing the comments from government backbenchers disparaging the work of teachers in this fine province, disparaging the quality of the education they're providing our children. This government has, from day one, decided to pick a fight with the teachers.

There are thousands and thousands of teachers who have gathered together and met in places like Ottawa and York region, today in Mississauga and in Toronto and in northern communities like Ogama and Iroquois Falls, tomorrow in many other places, Wednesday in Belleville — tomorrow is Hamilton — amazing numbers of teachers coming out because they are fighting to preserve the quality of education. They will accept nothing less and neither will we in the opposition.

Can this government commit to reinvest every single penny you save from restructuring school boards out there and shrinking the number of school boards, reinvest every penny into the classroom, into improving quality of education? We have asked the Minister of Education a number of times to make that commitment; he has refused.

The minister and the Premier continue to disparage the work of teachers in this province. That's backed up by your refusal to have a statement on World Teachers' Day and your refusal to celebrate the day by wearing the button. Shame, shame.

GUILD INN

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): Scarborough city council has recently recommended that the Guild Inn be designated as a property of historical value and interest under the Ontario Heritage Act. I'm certain that I speak on behalf of my neighbours, the residents of Guildwood Village, and indeed on behalf of all residents of Scarborough in welcoming this move.

The main building on the property was constructed in 1914 as a country home for Colonel Harold C. Bickford, and in 1932 the property was acquired by the late Spencer and Rosa Clark, who established the Guild of All Arts, a haven for the promotion of arts and for housing artists during the years of the Great Depression. Among the crafts practised there were weaving, tooled leather, block printing, pewter, copper and woodworking.

During the Second World War the federal government took over the inn for the training of WRENS, and subsequently it was converted to a military hospital. With the end of the war, the Clarks resumed operation of the inn.

In the 1960s, the Clarks sold much of the huge estate, and the community of Guildwood Village was built on these lands.

Throughout the landscaped grounds of the property are architectural fragments salvaged from historic buildings demolished in Toronto, as well as the Osterhout cabin, the oldest existing building in Metropolitan Toronto. The property is a popular site for weddings, parties, art shows, community gatherings and casual walks.

Since our election in 1995, I've called for the guaranteed preservation of this great resource, and I believe that Scarborough council is to be commended for designating the Guild Inn as a historic property.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): I have received a letter from Mrs Lori Drouillard of Windsor, Ontario. On Friday, Lori was picking up her four-and-a-half-year-old daughter from her school bus. As she watched in horror, there were not two, not three, but five cars that passed the school bus when its lights were flashing. She took the licence plate numbers and called the police, who advised her there was nothing they could do.

I get calls on an almost daily basis in one or more of my offices from parents and teachers who are terrified that a careless driver will maim or kill an innocent child. They want to know why Mr Palladini refuses to pass vehicle liability.

Mrs Drouillard says, "The drivers of these vehicles must take responsibility for breaking the law." She goes on to say, "The law now only protects irresponsible drivers, not our children."

Colleen Marcuzzi has said the minister wants to do the political thing, not the right thing. Your job is to protect innocent children, not guilty drivers. Lives are at stake, Minister. Pass vehicle liability. Do it now, for the children.

1340

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): On Sunday, October 19, at 1 pm there is a rally at Metro Square which everyone who cares about the future of public transportation in Metro should attend. The Toronto Transit Commission has been starved by the Mike Harris government and Metro council may deal with the problem by raising students' and seniors' fares by a whopping 50%.

TTC riders now pay almost 80% of the costs of running the system. That's more than riders anywhere else in North America. There is no way the TTC can survive and maintain quality service for people at affordable rates without assistance from the provincial government. But things are only going to get worse because, as part of the provincial downloading, the Harris government will be contributing 0.0%. If you are a TTC rider, this sure puts that tax cut in perspective, doesn't it?

I spent some time early Friday morning standing at a Danforth subway station with local councillors Jack Layton and Peter Tabuns, alerting people to the problem and asking them to sign a petition. Not surprisingly, with everything else going on, most people were unaware of the issue, but believe me, almost everyone signed without hesitation and expressed deep concern.

Please get involved. Tell Mike Harris to fund the TTC and tell Metro not to increase fares for seniors and students by 50%. The rally is sponsored by the Rocket Riders. They can be reached at 596-0500 for further information. Hope to see you all there.

RITSON PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I rise in the House today regarding the 75th anniversary of one of Oshawa's educational cornerstones, Ritson Public School. Since its first 350 students entered its doors in 1923, Ritson Public School has delivered quality education to its generations of students and holds a special place in the hearts of many of the former students, including such greats as Tata Mary, Tata Sylvia and my mother.

The school is named after a prominent Oshawa educator and citizen, John Ritson, who was the first teacher of a local area school built in 1812 and a Sunday school superintendent. His dedication and commitment to educating Oshawa's youth continues at the school which is his namesake.

The school has always sought to offer increased educational opportunities for its students. One such opportunity at Ritson Public School is a special program that has been a model for similar initiatives around the region of Durham. This program relates to the development, understanding and implementation of acceptable social skills. Programs such as computer-assisted learning technology are being piloted this year as the school adapts to the change in technology in education.

Ritson Public School has grown in its first 75 years and adapted well to the educational needs of Oshawa's youth. The community support and the dedicated faculty and staff of the school are committed to continuing the tradition of excellence in one of Oshawa's earliest schools. I'd like to congratulate Ritson Public School on its 75th year. The school's 75th anniversary celebrations will continue throughout the year, concluding in June.

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): It is no wonder that government members did not even want us wearing buttons in recognition of the fact that yesterday, October 5, was World Teachers' Day. Across the world, the invaluable contributions of teachers were being celebrated, but here in Ontario there was not a mood of celebration. We were all too caught up in the tension of the educational crisis this government has created.

Isn't it ironic that while the rest of the world focused on celebrating the achievements of teachers, our Minister of Education and our Premier escalated their war on teachers. Our Minister of Education has deliberately picked a fight by describing teachers as underworked and overpaid. Our Minister of Education is so determined to take $1 billion out of the system that he's willing to put non-teachers into the classroom to teach our students. We have a government in Ontario that has already taken $1 billion out of education and still wants $1 billion more, and a Premier who said last week that teachers in Ontario can't be trusted when it comes to delivering quality education.

Why do the minister and the Premier not want to talk about the fact that our grade 4 students came second on the international science and math tests, or that our grade 7 students scored above the international average in science? Where do they acknowledge that our teachers have made that kind of achievement possible, even in classes where their students have a wide range of abilities and even languages? Is the Harris government so determined to prove the system is broken that they still will not celebrate the international award of excellence given to the Durham Board of Education or the national recognition for educational excellence given last week to Red Lake? We should be celebrating the achievement of our students and our teachers.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): As things continue to heat up around Bill 160, it becomes clear that the government's agenda is to try and persuade Ontarians that what they are up against is the force of the teacher union bosses, because anybody who is elected in any kind of labour association representing working people at any workplace is automatically labelled a union boss and therefore a legitimate special interest and therefore a legitimate enemy of this government.

The reality, as those of us who are parents see our children going back to school, is that Ontarians are seeing teachers not as a group being used and manipulated by union bosses but rather as individual citizens and neighbours and family members who care about their kids, and when Ontarians think about teachers individually, your whole argument falls apart.

I can tell you that just like under Bill 136, when all our communities, my own in Hamilton included, saw that the 136 debate wasn't just about those workers and those rights, that it was about our communities and the quality of our communities and the quality of life for our families, you will begin to see that you do not have the support you think you do. Ontarians will rally behind teachers because Bill 160 is about our communities, it's about our kids, it's about our families, and you're not going to pick a fight and destroy that.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): Once again I have the honour to rise in this House on behalf of the White Ribbon Against Pornography campaign, WRAP for short. The week of October 19 to 26 has been declared WRAP Week across Canada. I have distributed the WRAP pamphlets and white ribbons to all members of this House and request that they consider wearing the ribbons starting Sunday, October 19, 1997.

The annual White Ribbon Campaign encourages all citizens to wear the white ribbon as an expression of their concern with the proliferation of pornography and its negative effects upon our communities and the men, women and children living in those communities.

Wearing the ribbon is not a solution but an important method of bringing awareness to this growing problem. It's a simple program with positive results: It educates the public regarding a multibillion-dollar business; it unites all citizens who are concerned; it increases the awareness of police, judiciary and community leaders; and it expresses standards of community tolerance.

I thank all the volunteers in the Catholic Women's League for their hard work in making this campaign possible across Ontario and Canada. I thank members of this Legislature for support of this very important initiative.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 148, An Act to deal with matters relating to the establishment of the new City of Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 8, 1997, this bill is ordered for third reading.

1350

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c), the House shall meet from 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm on Tuesday, October 7, 1997, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Hon David Johnson: I move that pursuant to standing order 9(e)(i), the House shall meet from 6:30 pm to 12 midnight on Wednesday, October 8, 1997, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Hon David Johnson: I move that pursuant to standing order 9(e)(i), the House shall meet from 6:30 pm to 12 midnight on Thursday, October 9, 1997, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent for the three parties to make a statement in honour of World Teachers' Day.

The Speaker: The member for Beaches-Woodbine is asking for unanimous consent for each of the three parties to make a statement on World Teachers' Day. Agreed? I heard a no.

It's time for oral questions. Official opposition: leader of the official opposition.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Speaker, I have questions for the Minister of Education and I believe he's making his way in now.

The Speaker: I don't know where he is, actually. Stand it down? Your second question?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Unanimous consent that we give the Minister of Education prep time to get ready for his question.

The Speaker: New question, third party.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I have a question for the Minister of Education, who obviously now understands the need for prep time.

The Speaker: I'm going to go back to the official opposition for the first question. Can you reset the clock, please?

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Minister, there are going to be thousands and thousands of people tonight gathering in Maple Leaf Gardens. They're not going to be there to watch a hockey game and they're not there to attend a rock concert. They will be there to talk about Bill 160 and they will be there to talk about you.

Last week the committee considering Bill 160 received all kinds of letters, in fact hundreds and hundreds of letters, from parents who are very concerned about what's happening with your Bill 160. Furthermore, we now know that thousands and thousands of students have been walking out across the province in expression of their concerns about your Bill 160.

Although we are getting closer and closer with each passing day, a strike is not inevitable. You can do something about it. Just tell us, right here and now, that you're not going to cut one single additional penny from education.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I can assure the Leader of the Opposition of exactly what we've been saying for the last year, which is this: We will not have our students subjected to a general legislative grant program to fund education, which hasn't worked in the interests of students. We will not do that.

We will have a new funding system that's based on students' needs. We will work with experts in education, we are working with experts in education to identify those student needs. I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that we will fund every one of those student needs. We will make sure the students in the province of Ontario have the best education system in Canada. That's our intention. That's why this government has assumed the responsibility to fund education. That's our promise. That's our commitment. I intend to be held to account for it.

Mr McGuinty: The minister talks about what he's been saying for the last year and he still doesn't understand that's not good enough. We are still on the brink of a

province-wide strike involving 126,000 teachers and 2.1 million students. What you've been saying to date is not working. We're still on a collision course. You've got to get that into your head and you've got to do something about it.

Here is another option for you. We know that it's over a year ago now that you, through secret focus groups and polling, were talking about getting rid of 10,000 Ontario teachers. That's been planted in the minds of our teachers for a long time now. Last week you said, "No, it may not be 10,000, probably closer to 5,000 teachers that we're going to have to let go."

Here is another option for you, Minister. Stand up right now, because I know you are genuinely interested in avoiding a strike, and tell us that we're not going to have one single teacher let go as a result of your Bill 160.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I don't share the Leader of the Opposition's view that we'll have a strike in the province of Ontario, an illegal strike. I don't think that will happen and I've said that all along. I believe in the honour and the professionalism of teachers and I know that they'll honour their obligation to their students and to their contractual obligations.

I know it's surprising to the Leader of the Opposition. He's the person who tabled legislation in this House that would eliminate the right to strike. We haven't gone down that path. We've honoured the right to strike for teachers.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): That's not true.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Fort William, you can't-

Mrs McLeod: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I want the Leader of the Opposition to be assured that we have invited the Ontario Teachers' Federation to meet with us on four separate occasions to work out an early retirement plan that would help us invigorate the teaching profession, and make sure that those who wanted a graceful exit from teaching could do so, and so that, yes, the reductions in the number of secondary school teachers made necessary by asking secondary school teachers to have the average amount of time with their students as other teachers in Canada will be met through attrition.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr McGuinty: There are a few things we know for sure in all of this. First of all, we know that parents don't want a strike. Secondly, we know that students don't want a strike. If the minister took the time and genuinely expressed an interest in hearing from teachers, he would quickly discover that teachers don't want to strike.

On the other hand, we have a minister who has refused to promise here and now that he's not going to take any more money out of the education system and we've got a minister who has now refused to promise that this is not about laying off teachers. It seems the only person who really wants a strike — a massive, full-scale, all-out education strike in Ontario — is the Minister of Education himself, John Snobelen. He's the guy who's setting on this collision course.

Why are you so hell-bent on forcing a strike, Minister, and how is it that common sense in a government could possibly bring us right to the brink so that we're looking at 2.1 million students being put out of school?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I can tell you, from sitting in this chamber day in and day out over the last few weeks and listening to the member for Fort William and the Leader of the Opposition raise again and again issues that simply are not based in fact, that the people who have the most interest in causing a labour disruption with teachers in the province of Ontario are our colleagues across the floor: the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Fort William and the rest of your colleagues.

I can tell you, if you have an ounce of decency or concern about students in Ontario, you'll drop the empty rhetoric, you'll quit misrepresenting the position of the government and you will honestly represent what's in the best interests of our students.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister, I would ask you to withdraw that last statement.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I withdraw it.

The Speaker: Thank you. New question, leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: The second question is for the same minister. That, from the minister whose Premier last week said, "We can't trust teachers to deliver quality education in Ontario." Talk about going into negotiations in a true and genuine spirit of conciliation. It's all there for us.

1400

You have told us from the outside, Minister, that our teachers are overpaid and underworked. Your Premier tells us that they can't be trusted to deliver quality education.

It seems to me, and I may be a little bit old-fashioned in this regard, that our Minister of Education should be saying maybe three things: (1) we value teaching in Ontario; (2) we value our teachers; and (3) we have some basic inkling as to the kinds of challenges teachers have to contend with in classrooms in 1997 in Ontario. It seems to me that's the kind of stuff a Minister of Education ought to be saying. My question for you is, why don't you respect our teachers?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Of course, much of what the Leader of the Opposition has said in his preamble is simply not based in fact. I know that the Leader of the Opposition knows I have stood in my place in this House on many occasions and said that the key piece of our education system, the thing we need to build on, is the expertise and the ability and the commitment of our teachers. I just said that earlier today.

As a matter of fact, I have so much faith in our teachers and I have so much understanding of them as being the most professional teachers in Canada, the best-qualified teachers in Canada, that I believe they can spend the same amount of time with their students in classrooms as their colleagues from other provinces. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition has not that sort of faith in Ontario's teachers. We do.

Mr McGuinty: So now we have the great friend of teachers. I guess that explains the fact that we've got this wonderful development of the John Snobelen admiration society developing throughout the province. Teachers have been gathering by the thousands and uttering his name on a regular basis. They've met in Ottawa. They've met in Durham. They've met in London. They've met in Kitchener. They've met in Hamilton. They've met in Oshawa. They're meeting tonight here in Maple Leaf Gardens. I somehow just don't get the sense that they sense your deep respect for them, Minister.

Perhaps, though, there's an opportunity here. Tonight, after Maple Leaf Gardens, thousands and thousands of those loyal members of the John Snobelen admiration society will be gathering here at Queen's Park. Will you take the time to come out and say hello, with me, to your friends?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I'm pleased to tell the Leader of the Opposition that I am looking forward to meeting with the heads of teachers' unions later this week to talk about the substantive issues in Bill 160. I will not be there this evening.

I hope the Leader of the Opposition, if he has an opportunity to address people who are concerned about education, will represent the file fairly, that he'll suggest to people who are in attendance that it takes great courage to take on the real issues in education. It takes great courage to ask the tough questions — courage not shown by your government when you were in power, courage not shown, with the greatest of respect, by the previous government, but courage now shown — to ask the tough questions for the betterment of the students in Ontario, and that is what we are doing. I hope the Leader of the Opposition will fairly represent that.

Mr McGuinty: Let's talk about the kind of courage displayed by this government to date. They had the courage to cut back on junior kindergarten. They had the courage to cut back on adult education. They had the courage to cut back on special education. Now, that is the tremendously warm and encouraging kind of courage we need to hear in education in this province.

Let's go over this again from the beginning. You won't promise that you're not going to take any more money out of education, you won't promise that this bill is not an exercise to put thousands of teachers out of work, and now you're even refusing tonight to meet with teachers themselves.

Here is your last chance to avoid a strike. Teachers have told us it is second reading that's going to trigger the strike. What have you done? You've sped this process up. You've now closed the debate. A strike is now even closer, compliments of you and your government.

Let's stop debating this bill. Let's put the bill on ice. Stand up right now: "We're not going to go on with debate because we know we're too close to the brink and there is too much at stake. We're going to put it on ice." Would you just tell us that right now so we can all go home and relax a bit more?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let me be very, very clear that I am interested in and believe it would be fruitful to have conversations with, to have a dialogue with, to discuss the relevant issues with the leaders of the teachers' unions, and I hope to do that later on this week.

I have a faith and a belief in teachers that they will honour their obligations to their students. I have always had that faith in our teachers, although the Leader of the Opposition does not. I will not do what you might do in the same circumstance, obviously from the record, and that is to sell out on our students, to sell out on their futures, to sell out on having the best education system in Canada, because that is the commitment of this minister and this government and it always will be.

The Speaker: New question, the third party.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I have a question for the Minister of Education and Training. If the minister is really sincere in what he just said, then he should prevail upon the government House leader not to call a time allocation motion today and to postpone it until after he meets with the leaders of the teachers' federations.

Last year the minister, in commemoration of World Teachers' Day, said he was committed to changes to our education system that would enable teachers to work as effectively as possible, yet this year the minister is taking away the very tools that teachers need to meet the needs of their students. He has proposed cutting secondary school teachers' preparation time by 50% and he's ignoring the Education Improvement Commission's recommendations to reinvest all savings into education that might come from restructuring our schools.

Will the minister commit today to hold off on time allocation and make a public commitment that any money that is saved from restructuring our education system — any and all money — will be reinvested in the education of our students?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I believe the member for Algoma will know that we have a very public commitment to making sure we meet the needs of our students, of having the province of Ontario take accountability and responsibility for that funding finally and at long last.

I want to assure the member for Algoma, and I want to make this promise very clearly: We will not back away from the tough questions and the tough issues to get a better education system for our students and we will not pass the bill on to our students as your government did.

Mr Wildman: What the minister is saying is that he is going to make the students of today pay and they're going to pay through cuts to education.

Thousands of teachers will be rallying, as we all know, in Toronto and Mississauga, Iroquois Falls, Gogama and Espanola today. Tomorrow they are meeting in Dubreuilville, Hamilton and Wawa. Wednesday it's Belleville, Hornepayne, Victoria-Hailburton, Lindsay and Fenelon Falls.

The minister has indicated he won't meet with the teachers here this evening. We've heard reports that the minister is considering a commitment to reinvesting the $1 billion he plans to cut from education if the teachers give

up their preparation time and pension funds. Is that why the minister won't meet tonight? Is the minister essentially saying that a reinvestment in the education of our students will become a bargaining chip to offer to teachers in return for them giving up their pensions and their prep time?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The whole premise of the legislation we have before the House today is to not have students be bargaining chips; to be able to guarantee quality instead of bargaining quality, which the member might be used to.

I know the member for Algoma to be a decent person and I am surprised that he would stand here today to talk about making students pay when his government handed them a $41,000 debt and diminished their future, a future we are trying desperately to restore for them. That's the reason we're doing this work and that's why we won't be satisfied with a mediocre education system. We'll have the best education system in Canada because that's what we owe our students.

Mr Wildman: That's exactly the problem. When it comes to the crunch, the minister can only confront. It's time that he cooled down and backed off. It's not just me or other members of this House who are saying this. This morning, 40 religious leaders from the Waterloo region sent a letter to the Premier saying:

"Massive cutbacks of teachers and other resources in our schools under the name of education reform is a misuse of language and upsetting to us. Our children's needs in maintaining the high quality of education provided by our teachers must not be the victims of such aggressive tactics" — 40 interfaith leaders from the religious community in Waterloo.

These religious leaders believe that the minister is poisoning the atmosphere for real improvements to our education system by not committing clearly to reinvestment of all of the money and to true educational reform.

1410

Will the minister make it clear now, to avoid a confrontation and to back off and cool things out and meet the demands at least of these religious leaders that you reinvest all of the money in the education of our students?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The member for Algoma may have difficulty in understanding what a zero-based budget is, but I'll go through this slowly one more time. A zero-based budget is one where you start with no assumptions about your past spending habits, which we know did not work. We know that your spending habits made second-class students of some of the young people in Ontario, and that was not acceptable.

We are going through the work now of building a funding system that will meet the individual needs of every student in Ontario. And yes, we intend to invest in those areas that matter to our students in the classrooms in Ontario, and we'll make sure that investment is at a level where every single student in the province has a high quality education. That's our commitment; that's our promise. It always has been, it always will be, and that's what we'll deliver.

ONTARIO HYDRO

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Environment, who is supposed to be responsible for Ontario Hydro. The minister will know that the chief executive officer, Mr Farlinger, is appearing before the select committee on Hydro affairs this afternoon. I have a report here from the nuclear performance advisory group, which indicated that there were serious problems at Ontario Hydro in its nuclear division. This is dated April 17.

When you were asked if you'd seen the report, you said, "No, but it wouldn't have made any difference if I had, because I wouldn't have done anything about it, I wouldn't have taken any action." We're talking about nuclear safety and the safety of communities here.

My question for you is, how can you possibly be so dismissive of an interim report that bears a striking similarity to the final report in August that resulted in the resignation of the president of Hydro and the future shutdown of seven nuclear reactors? How can you be so dismissive of that report?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): I welcome the opportunity to clarify my statement on television, which was about a 20-minute interview and there were about 10 seconds on the particular interview.

I replied to the questions with regard to this interim report in that I had not seen it. I had asked my staff what this report was about. This report was not new evidence. This was not new material. All of this material, or the great abundance of this material, had been produced in public before. It was not a surprise to anyone. As I understand it from the chairman of Hydro, and you may ask him this afternoon, it was nothing but a reiteration and a benchmark on which the safety committee was to go out and either verify or reject what had been found in the past. As a result of that, that was the reason for my response, that this was not new information which I might have received.

Mr Laughren: This story gets stranger and stranger by the day. Mr Farlinger, who headed up the advisory committee group, is the same person who, despite knowing this interim information, then went to the AECB and asked for a five-year licence for those nuclear reactors. How do you square that? Do you think Mr Farlinger was acting responsibly when he knew there were serious problems which were going to result in the shutdown of those seven reactors? Do you think he was acting responsibly when he then went to the AECB and asked for a five-year licence and even hinted that a 10-year licence would be better? Do you think that's acting responsibly?

Hon Mr Sterling: The member opposite will have an opportunity to ask Mr Farlinger that. I believe there's a response which you can give, but unfortunately I don't have the time in this House to respond because it's a very complex subject.

I would say that Mr Farlinger and I have been in constant communication not only during this period of

investigation of the safety of our nuclear reactors but prior to that. I would remind the member opposite that it was Mr Farlinger and Ontario Hydro who took the initiative to engage these people to look at themselves and to examine their own safety. There was no statutory obligation; there was no obligation upon them to do it. So to allege now that there is a coverup by the very people who ordered the investigation I find somewhat strange.

Mr Laughren: That's interesting because I find you strange from time to time as well. I must say I'm puzzled by your role in this whole affair. I'm wondering whether, first of all, you knew anything at all about that interim report back in April, and if you didn't know anything about it, how you feel today knowing that the people at Hydro who are supposed to report to you knew about that interim report, then went to the AECB and asked for a five-year licence, and then said, "No, it's so serious at Hydro that we have to shut down seven reactors and the president is going to resign." How in the world do you fit that with your role as the minister to whom Hydro bosses are supposed to report? How do you feel about that?

Hon Mr Sterling: As I said, the interim report was old news. It was news which not only was there in public written form but also was there and discussed in a public forum, and that was the AECB hearing which decided in December to give Pickering only a six-month licence. If there was ever anything that publicized the vulnerability of our nuclear program to the public, it was that particular licensing action.

In terms of all the chairmen we have had of Ontario Hydro, I would say the present chairman has been more open, more forthright and more resolved to deal with this problem than any other chair of Ontario Hydro before, and I applaud him in his efforts. He will be appearing in a public way in front of your select committee, the select committee of the Legislature, on these matters this afternoon and will be making all these documents — he will be able to answer all those questions. I don't think we should be ashamed of the performance of Mr Farlinger and the nuclear performance team; I think we should laud it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Minister of Finance and it has to do with Bill 160. We asked the Minister of Education this question last week, but he had frankly no idea what was in the bill.

Bill 160, the education bill, purports to give you, the cabinet, Mike Harris, unprecedented powers. The way we read the bill, the cabinet can set, without any debate, no public input, no opportunity for any debate on it, $6 billion worth of property taxes. You can simply sign a document and $6 billion of property taxes will then be raised. It seems to us extraordinary. It seems to us that's the sort of thing the public should be involved in. It seems to us that's the sort of thing we should be debating here in the Legislature. My question to the minister is this: Why does Mike Harris want to give himself the power to set $6 billion worth of property taxes?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): First of all, no rates will be set without consultation both with the public and in committee. Bill 160 will be going to committee. Bill 149 will be going to committee.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Eves: The honourable members don't seem to like the committee process; they don't seem to want bills to go to committee.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. Minister.

Hon Mr Eves: For example, I have made a commitment under Bill 149, and the honourable member knows this all too well. There were some 25 regulatory powers initially outlined in Bill 149 that could be set by regulation. I changed seven of those into amendments of the statute because I, like he, was concerned that the more that can be in statute, the better. I also tabled in this House about a week and a half ago another additional seven proposed regulations; they're all going to be in committee for members and members of the public to debate. I hope, quite frankly, to have more proposed regulations so they can be debated and considered by the committee and the public.

1420

Mr Phillips: I said earlier that if Bob Rae had ever tried to pass this bill when he was the Premier, Mike Harris would have gone berserk, because this bill — and the public should realize it — allows the Premier to set a third of the property tax with the stroke of a pen. It is taxation without representation. It's a huge mistake. It should never have been allowed to get to this point in the Legislature. As I say, if Bob Rae were still the Premier, Mike Harris would be so red-faced that he wouldn't be able to talk. It's just wrong.

My question to you is this: Will you agree that it is a mistake and that you will agree now to change the bill so that you cannot set property taxes with the stroke of a pen, secretly in the cabinet room, and that there must be a public vote before you set property taxes?

Hon Mr Eves: The honourable member knows that these things are not done in secret, that they are done by regulation. He knows full well, for example, that there are 68 powers in the Retail Sales Tax Act that are done by regulation. His government did it when David Peterson was in power; their government did it when Bob Rae was in power. The provincial land tax has 11 such provisions.

However, I can tell you this: We will make sure that education taxes across this province are fair. We will freeze the rate on education taxes across this province. The exact rate, he knows quite fully because he has been briefed on this by the finance ministry, cannot be determined until later this fall when all the exact assessment information is in, but he can be assured of one thing: It makes sense for people to pay for a service like education that benefits us all at the same rate regardless of where we

live. That is the fair and equitable thing to do. That's what we'll do. That's what your governments didn't have the courage to do.

FINANCING OF CONSERVATION GROUPS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I have a question for the Minister of Environment and Energy. Today we read in the press that Conservation Ontario, the umbrella group for Ontario's conservation authorities, is selling seats on its board. The first buyer is Dofasco, named last year by Environment Canada as one of the big polluters on the Great Lakes. You have cut conservation authorities by two thirds by now. There is a limit — you should know this — to how much cutting you can do before you do exactly what's happening now: drive conservation groups and others to go further and further into the arms of corporate Canada. Does it bother you that a major group that is responsible for public lands is selling seats on its board to raise money?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): This is clearly within the purview of my cabinet colleague the Minister of Natural Resources, who is not here, and I would take the question on notice for him.

Ms Churley: Minister, you are responsible. You are the Minister of Environment, and this is about environmental protection. I would like you to tell me, as the environment minister, that no, you don't approve of this and that you will talk to the Minister of Natural Resources about at least your opinion.

I would say to you that there is nothing wrong with corporate donations. In fact, I would say that corporations should be paying more for the public benefits they receive. The problems come, as you should know, when conservation groups give up control, when groups are so desperate for money that they let corporations run them. I want to ask you now: Will you work with the Minister of Natural Resources and tell Conservation Ontario that you do not approve and ask them to reverse their decision?

Hon Mr Sterling: I have been given some information. I understand Conservation Ontario is seeking to gain support from a whole number of sectors, including the government. We are in a number of areas in the environment, in terms of the overall natural resources we have in this province, encouraging not only people on the street but our corporations and everyone to pitch in and do more than they have in the past.

I imagine that the Minister of Natural Resources, who is responsible for this area, would welcome all of those contributions towards keeping our provincial parks and conservation lands in the best possible condition they could be. We are not excluding anybody; we are including everybody in this endeavour.

TOURISM

Mr John L. Parker (York East): My question is for my good friend and colleague the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. I was very pleased to see in yesterday's paper that tourist spending in Toronto is expected to be nearly $5 billion this year. In fact, Kirk Shearer, president of Tourism Toronto, is quoted as saying that the number of visitors to Toronto this year is on track to exceed last year's total by over one million. This proves again that tourism is a very important sector in Toronto.

Minister, can you assure my constituents, many of whom are here this afternoon in the company of one of East York's many fine secondary school teachers, Mr Short, that you recognize tourism as an important contributor to the economy and tell them over the din of the opposition, if you can, what you are doing to promote and enhance tourism?

Hon William Saunderson (Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism): I am very happy to respond to the question from the member for East York. First of all, I agree very much with him that tourism is a very valuable contributor to our provincial economy in Ontario. In 1996, total employment in this sector was 413,000 people, a large number. Total tourist spending was $14 billion last year. That's up about 15% from the previous year.

The preliminary numbers for this year look extremely good and we're expecting very good numbers, which I am sure is very good news to all of us assembled here today. It is the quintessential small business. Tourism is small business. It is the fifth largest economic sector in Ontario.

I'd like to give some examples of the proactive work we are doing to show that Ontario is a top tourist destination. We have a tourist action plan. We have one-stop tourism reservation and information networks. We have a new tourism information signage program. We're celebrating Tourism Awareness Week annually. We support tourist-generating high-profile events by helping out at such events as the Molson Indy.

Interjections.

Mr Parker: I had a suspicion you were going to have difficulty getting that message out. Somehow, the opposition just doesn't like to hear good news.

I appreciate the value of the efforts you just described, but I recognize that the tourism industry is becoming very highly competitive and I believe we have to do everything we possibly can to stay ahead of the game. Minister, do we have any benchmarks or follow-up that enable us to measure these marketing efforts and prove how effective they actually are?

Hon Mr Saunderson: Our government believes in measurement and benchmarks, and so does our ministry. First of all, we noticed the Tourism Toronto announcement that it was expecting 23 million visitors by the end of this year. That's a very good benchmark. The hotel occupancy rate is up almost 4%, and the Kitchener-Waterloo Record reports that tourism spending in their area grew by 7.3% last year.

To keep these numbers growing, we're working very hard with the industry to develop a very aggressive five-year strategic marketing plan. We've reintroduced our domestic advertising campaign. Our TV ads campaigns

have resulted in a 50% increase in North American calls to the 1-800-ONTARIO line.

Our marketing plan is supporting events such as the Ontario marketplace event which occurred last week in Waterloo, Ontario, and that is to promote Ontario to international tour operators. Two hundred foreign buyers attended that event, which goes to show dramatic interest in coming to Ontario. Tourism is on the rise.

1430

SPECIAL SERVICES AT HOME PROGRAM

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): My question is for the Deputy Premier. My question concerns cuts you have made to the disabled community. Your promise in your revolution says very clearly that aid to the disabled will not be cut.

Today we spoke with families who are here from other parts of Ontario, whose children are disabled and need special services at home. Gary, aged 38, was born with brain damage. Karen, with cerebral palsy, wasn't expected to live 42 years. David, who is 23 years old, has spastic cerebral palsy.

Minister, their condition hasn't changed, but your support for these families has been cut. Could you explain why you are cutting aid to the disabled?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): Speaking very specifically of the special services at home program, that program in fact has not been cut, as the member will know. Not only has it not been cut, but as of January of this year we added $5 million to that program. An additional $15 million will be going to the community to increase community services, and $5 million is going to the special services at home program to bring up the number of families it supports. This will bring the special services needs budget to approximately $42 million a year.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): Just like your $40 million in child care. You didn't spend any of it.

Hon Mr Eves: I say to the honourable member for Beaches-Woodbine, who insists on interjecting here, that this is one program, quite frankly, where we continued on the support your government gave it. As a matter of fact, since 1990 the total percentage increase —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Eves: — in the special services at home budget has gone up 131%, between 1990 and 1997, and this year alone this government is putting it up —

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs Pupatello: I guess my question continues for the Deputy Premier. Allison Ouellette is here today. She's David's mom. Her son requires 24-hour care. You have cut her special services at home from 20 hours to 10 hours. Katie Walters is here. She and her husband, who is 71 years old, have had a 60% cut in their hours, from 12 hours to five hours. There is no evidence of any new funding, just announcements, no proof of any funding. Family after family comes to us from across Ontario, one disabled person after another having their aid cut. Minister, that would make your document a lie.

I ask you again, Deputy Premier, how can you rationalize announcements with no evidence of actual spending when we have proof here today in the House of families whose children are having their aid cut?

Hon Mr Eves: In fact there is evidence of actual spending, and the spending in this program, as I've just alluded to, has gone up 131% since 1990. It's going up 12%, an additional $5 million, this year alone. For example, in the fiscal year 1994-95, 10,488 families, to be exact, were served by this program. They received an average annual stipend of $2,700 a year. The past fiscal year just ended, 1995-96, 11,500 families, exactly, received assistance under this program, fully 1,000 families more, and the aid has gone from $2,700 a year to $3,100 a year.

With respect to her specific examples, I would be more than happy to take them under advisement and take them up with the Minister of Community and Social Services, but I can assure the honourable member that this program has not been cut; in fact it's been enlarged by this government.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. While you continue in this House to define the need for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire by how many spin-doctored answers you can give to questions, your Premier seems to understand the law much better. The Premier yesterday said in Hamilton, "If the public feels it needs more answers, then we will look into an inquiry."

The law says, under the Public Inquiries Act, section 2, if it is "a matter of public concern." This is not about how many answers you can give in the House, this is not about how many MPPs speak out, it's not about how many groups speak out, it's not about whether you personally think there are any unanswered questions; it's whether there is public concern.

In light of what the law says and your Premier said, Minister, will you today acknowledge that there is public concern and that you have an obligation to call that public inquiry?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): I read the news article this morning and I read of the Premier's concern. It is my concern that all the people of Hamilton get adequate answers. The Premier said he thought the people were getting adequate answers at this time, which is the position I have maintained consistently over the last month with regard to this.

I have said, however, to the member before, and I'll say it again, the city of Hamilton and the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth have the power to call their own inquiry. Those politicians seem to see that there's a need to look behind their particular processes, and I would ask him to urge his own local politicians to call an inquiry of their own if they see that is necessary.

Mr Christopherson: Minister, you just don't seem to get it. You're not listening to anyone other than your own bureaucrats, who for some reason or other feel they have something to worry about if there's a public inquiry. The fact is, you're the Minister of Environment for the province of Ontario. There are other communities, like Oshawa, Ajax, Burlington, Halton, Niagara, Toronto, in addition to our own local councils, that have said they want this looked at from beginning to end to determine how the fire happened, how adequate the responses were, and whether we could improve your ministry's role as well as that of local communities, because they're worried about their own communities.

My question to you is, will you please stop putting the blinkers on and your fingers in your ears and listen to what people in the community are saying? They want the answers. They want the public inquiry. You have an obligation. Stand up. Take responsibility. Take what you have to take and call that public inquiry now.

Hon Mr Sterling: Last week, this member stood in the House and stated categorically that the city of Hamilton and the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth didn't have the authority under their legislation to call an inquiry. He found out after that he was wrong, dead wrong.

What am I to make of his protestations at this time? We have been doing, along with the fire marshal, a review of our regulations, of our legislation, to determine steps we can take. We believe that can be achieved outside of an inquiry. If the local governments feel that an inquiry is necessary, I invite them to have one.

As well, my ministry is expending its efforts and money on a $1.8-million cleanup of the Plastimet site. This fire was not caused by environmental issues. It was caused by someone who lit a fire in that area, and the fire code was not being followed.

PROVINCIAL COLLEGES

COLLÈGES PROVINCIAUX

Mr Ed Doyle (Wentworth East): My question today is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Because my riding has a great rural area, I realize the importance of education in matters of agriculture, and I'd like to direct my question to the minister.

I understand that you attended the inauguration of the new Sudbury campus for Collège Boréal during the weekend, and I wondered if you could agree whether this is an example of the government's strong commitment to education in the province of Ontario.

Hon Noble Villeneuve (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs): To my colleague from Wentworth East, yes, I was very privileged to attend the official opening of Collège Boréal in Sudbury, the main campus and a number of satellite campuses that will be joined up with Collège Boréal, along with four of my colleagues from the Legislature here and two of my federal colleagues. And yes, it was a very, very impressive opening, a new way of teaching — teaching via satellites and long distances in the north — that really recognizes the needs of our students.

Le campus Boréal et ses satellites sont orientés à la fine pointe de la technologie et sans aucun doute montrent un exemple modèle pour plusieurs autres des collèges. Alors, il me fait plaisir de féliciter le président, M. Jean Watters, et tous ses collègues qui ont travaillé d'arrache-pied pour assurer la venue du Collège Boréal, un collège qui va desservir la francophonie du nord pour de nombreuses générations.

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Mr Doyle: My supplementary question: I understand that the recently formed partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the University of Guelph has resulted in some impressive enrolment numbers at our agricultural colleges and at the University of Guelph. With the opposition of course constantly spreading doom and gloom, I wonder if you could share these positive numbers with the members of this House.

Hon Mr Villeneuve: The enhanced partnerships with the agricultural colleges from across Ontario with the University of Guelph have been very, very positive and they will ensure a responsive delivery of essential research and laboratory and education programming.

I'm sure members of the opposition will be interested in this good news, and it is good news, because enrolment at Ridgetown, as an example, has reached its highest level, at 180 students, for first-year enrolment, when the average was 150. I want to tell you that when these students graduate, they do find employment in their chosen field, the agrifood sector, at 85%.

That is a success story. We're very proud of it. The enrolment at all our agricultural colleges is up this year and that just shows everyone the importance of the agrifood sector in this province.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): My question is to the Minister of Education. Last night I attended a town hall meeting in Dryden of well over 200 people, and many of those in attendance were awfully concerned about the dismantling of education in Ontario, particularly in Dryden. After listening to the crowd — we had parents there, we had students there, we had trustees and teachers there — I have heard that they are certainly not going to be silenced on the cuts that they are seeing in the town of Dryden to the education system.

As a matter of fact, one parent was actually brought to tears when she stood before that crowd and before us as a panel to talk about the erosion of special education services to her child. If you were on that panel, what would you tell that parent, again, who was brought to tears, about the lack of services that she has seen to a child who needs special education service in the town of Dryden?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I want you to know that I have heard from

parents across the province over the course of two years that, under the old funding system, the wrong services were reduced in education. There was too much money spent on bureaucracy, too much money spent on the political governance of our schools, and not enough money going to the kids who needed it, especially those students with special needs.

The member opposite knows that there has been no reduction in the special needs envelope and yet we have seen some examples where some of those services have deteriorated over the last four or five years. So we are getting rid of the general legislative grant system. We are building a funding model with special needs students entrenched in that model so that we can meet their needs and guarantee that we will meet those needs to parents like the one you have just mentioned.

Mr Miclash: Let me tell you, they are not believing that in Dryden. This morning, over 150 students walked out of Dryden High School to show their anger about the cuts. They are feeling those cuts at the high school level in Dryden, and you don't seem to get it. You just don't seem to get it.

I started off this term asking you to phone a teacher on the front line. You refused to call her. You don't want to listen to what is happening out there. You've created your crisis in education. The parents, the teachers, the trustees, they've all seen it. They feel that you've created that crisis. The students are walking out. The teachers are very, very frustrated. You must be hearing that. I hear that every day. I heard that last night from many, many teachers. We've got students outside right now who have probably walked, as the students in Dryden have walked this morning, to show that they are feeling these cuts.

You are not listening to the concerns of these people. They are now convinced that you have created your crisis, and now that you've created your crisis, they are asking me to ask you to step aside. Minister, will you resign?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let's talk about what has been created in education in Ontario. The Liberal government, the NDP, the previous government, were willing to allow our students to have a mediocre education, middle of the road, middle of pan-Canadian tests. It didn't offend you. It certainly offends this government.

You were willing to have a system of funding in education in the province where young people in Dryden and other parts of Ontario didn't have their needs met and parents were left not knowing whom to hold to account for that.

This government, step by step by step, is building a better education for those young people in Ontario. We're going to be able to stand here and say that the province is responsible for funding education and meeting the needs of those students. I'm proud of that and so are my colleagues.

CASINO GAMBLING

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. When your government first got elected, the city of Sault Ste Marie asked for the green light to go ahead with a full-fledged casino. It wasn't going to cost you a penny, but you told them you weren't going to allow any more casinos in the province until you had a province-wide referendum. Well, we have it on good authority that you're not going to do that. As a matter of fact, I have a letter here from the mayor of Sault Ste Marie to the Premier, cc'd to yourself, asking for some clarification on that, referencing the mayor of Point Pelee, who has the same concern. Minister, given that you're not going to do a province-wide referendum, is Sault Ste Marie going to get a full-fledged casino, yes or no?

Hon William Saunderson (Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism): I'm pleased to respond to the question from the member for Sault Ste Marie. He has referred to the casino matter in Sault Ste Marie. He knows that I have spoken many times to the mayor of Sault Ste Marie and I have been in Sault Ste Marie. We have had many discussions about a casino for Sault Ste Marie. I told the mayor, as I think I've told the member before, that until we have a province-wide referendum we will not be establishing any more major casinos like the ones in Windsor, Niagara Falls or Rama. That is the situation. We won't do it until we have this referendum, and I have said this time and time again. Until we have that referendum, we will not be proceeding with major casinos.

Mr Martin: Maybe you didn't hear me, Minister. We have it on good authority that you're not going to do this province-wide referendum.

Let me paint the picture for you here that's being presented out there. On one hand, you're going to force municipalities that don't want them to have these permanent charitable casinos, yet we have in this province municipalities that want full-fledged casinos so they can benefit from the economic activity that will be generated and you're saying you won't allow them to have them. They don't know any more what the process is. Is Sault Ste Marie going to get a casino or not?

Hon Mr Saunderson: Again I say that we'll have to wait until there is a province-wide referendum on a major casino. I might point out to the member for Sault Ste Marie that there are, as he knows, charitable gaming clubs which will be established in the province. They will take the place of the roving casinos, which have not been very charitable at all to charities. It's very possible that an area such as Sault Ste Marie can apply for and get a charitable gaming club. I know Windsor has that opportunity, as do any other centres that have major casinos at the present time. It's very possible that a casino of a charitable gaming club nature could come to Sault Ste Marie. It's up to the area to approve it.

1450

TRUCKING SAFETY

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The minister will be aware that in 1989 a convoy of dump trucks surrounded

this building in protest. As a result, the government of the day stopped enforcing axle weight limits on the aggregate industry. The minister will also know that this situation continued for seven years, until last year when the province again began enforcing the limits. Minister, what has been the result of the enforcement of this legislation?

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for the question. Certainly since July 1996 the ministry lifted a moratorium, as we all know, and now the industry is complying with the axle weight enforcement.

We also began enforcing Bill 179, passed under the previous government, which places joint liability on the shipper and carrier for axle and gross vehicle weight compliance. As a result of these changes, 100% of the aggregate industry is now subject to axle weight enforcement. Since July 1996, 2,836 axle weight charges have been laid. The compliance rate has increased from an estimated 15% in 1995 to 40% in 1996-97. I'm very pleased that we are going in the right direction.

Mr Stewart: Although this certainly is an improvement over the present state of affairs, I'm sure everyone would want to see a compliance rate of 100%. What plans does the minister have to further improve this compliance rate with axle weight laws?

Hon Mr Palladini: I agree that when it comes to obeying weight laws, our goal should be higher, and 40% is definitely not enough. Not only would this have a safety benefit but it would also benefit our highways and roads. Right now, my ministry is looking at ways to improve compliance to our weight laws. One way is through box markings, a program developed with the industry. Testing has shown that such a program could increase compliance levels to over 80%. We are very close to making some sort of decision that will help us get to that over 80% compliance. Certainly we will not stop until we get to 100%, because in the best interests of safety as well as protecting our roads, I believe there should be a compliance of 100% from the industry. I'm really happy to say that the industry is buying into this and we are working with ministry staff and industry in making a resolve.

WINDSOR CASINO

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a question to the Deputy Premier in the absence of the Premier. The Deputy Premier will recall that in 1995 the Premier promised a 10% cut of the casino profits to the city of Windsor. The Deputy Premier was widely quoted in our community in June as saying that the government is still prepared to look at that. Is it the government's intention to proceed with that promise and, if so, when can we expect to see it proceeded with?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): If the honourable member wants to go back a little further, I believe he was in municipal politics at the time the travelling road show for Bill 8, with the member for Riverdale, then the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, came to Windsor. I, along with his colleague the member for Wilson Heights, was sitting on that committee.

I introduced an amendment, as he will know, and I'm sure he's checked the record, that would allow municipalities in the province to participate up to 10% from a casino located within their jurisdiction. The government of the day didn't think that was a very good idea and unfortunately voted that amendment down.

However, there have been ongoing discussions, as he knows, with the mayor of Windsor and the city of Windsor with respect to this matter. The mayor of Windsor has come forward to the government with several what I would call quite innovative proposals that perhaps would replace any commitment —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Eves: — that he may see or anybody else may see of any casino profits going to municipalities. I am confident that the government will continue to look at his proposals and requests and that —

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition concerns Bill 160 and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their students to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's educational system; and

"Whereas you cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents, teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students," as is evidenced in the demonstration today, "parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and to be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for the students, the parents or the teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature to this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): My petition is to the Minister of Environment and Energy and the Premier.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire.

I proudly join my constituents by adding my name.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 12 people.

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of the province of Ontario to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Northwestern Hospital provides quality health care to the residents of northwest Toronto; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario and the board of Humber River Regional Hospital are planning to close Northwestern Hospital as early as November 1997; and

"Whereas adequate replacement services are not available and the care of all residents in northwest Metro will be in jeopardy; and

"Whereas there have already been cases of risk to patients due to the rush to close Northwestern this summer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to guarantee that no shutdown of services at Northwestern occurs until replacement services are available, and further to review the quality of health services which will be available to the whole northwest area."

I add my signature to this petition and note for the pleasure of the assembly that today we had all three emergencies in this area closed down, unavailable to patients, and one of them is set to close in less than a month.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a further petition, differently worded, but still calling for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire.

"We, the undersigned, request the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy and Environment Canada jointly:

"(1) to conduct a full-scale public inquiry into the Hamilton Plastimet fire to determine the complete nature and extent of the pollution it has caused, the health effects on firefighters and others attending the fire, as well as residents in Hamilton and further afield; and

"(2) to ensure safe, speedy and complete cleanup of the fire site, plus residential and all other areas where chemicals from the fire have fallen out."

I continue to support these petitions.

ABORTION

Mrs Helen Johns (Huron): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario health system is overburdened and unnecessary spending must be cut; and

"Whereas pregnancy is not a disease, injury or illness and abortions are not therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the vast majority of abortions are done for reasons of convenience or finance; and

"Whereas the province has exclusive authority to determine what services will be insured; and

"Whereas the Canada Health Act does not require funding for elective procedures; and

"Whereas there is mounting evidence that abortion is in fact hazardous to women's health; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers funded over 45,000 abortions in 1993 at an estimated cost of $25 million;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cease from providing any taxpayers' dollars for the performance of abortions."

1500

VEHICLE REGISTRATION FEES

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the new Mike Harris northern vehicle registration tax does not recognize the uniqueness of the north; and

"Whereas Mike Harris should know that gas prices are higher in northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the new Mike Harris northern vehicle registration tax is blatantly unfair to the north; and

"Whereas we have no voice for the north, fighting for northerners around the cabinet table;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to revoke the new tax imposed on the north and convince the Tory government to understand that northern Ontario residents do not want the new Mike Harris vehicle registration tax."

I have affixed my name to that petition as well.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Windsor-Essex county was the first community to undergo hospital restructuring; and

"Whereas the community supported the recommendations of the Win-Win report based on a funding model that included the expansion of community-based care; and

"Whereas recent reports estimate that Windsor-Essex hospitals are underfunded by approximately $122 per person; and

"Whereas this represents the lowest funding per capita for hospital services of any community in Ontario with a population of over 200,000; and

"Whereas hospitals across the province have been forced to further reduce expenditures 18%; and

"Whereas these cuts have forced hospitals to eliminate emergency services in the west end of Windsor and cut desperately needed services; and

"Whereas the minister acknowledged that additional funding was necessary in high-growth areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the Minister of Health to provide appropriate levels of health care funding to hospitals in Windsor-Essex which would allow Windsor Regional Hospital to provide urgent care services for the west-end community and to restore equitable health care funding across Windsor and Essex county."

I join with hundreds of my fellow Windsorites in signing this petition.

TVONTARIO

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have yet a further petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas TVOntario is owned by the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has opposed public support for maintaining TVO as a publicly owned and funded educational broadcaster by putting TVO through a privatization review; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has not confirmed that full public participation will be part of this privatization review;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold open and honest public consultation with the people of Ontario before making a decision on the future of TVOntario."

I've affixed my name to this petition as well.

TUITION FEES

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Conservative government has cut funding to St Clair College; and

"Whereas these funding cuts have caused hardship on senior citizens by increasing the costs for their programs by more than 400%;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all college programs, be they educational or recreational, remain affordable and accessible to senior citizens."

I proudly affix my signature to this petition.

TVONTARIO

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have yet another petition, which is on the opposition to the privatization of TVOntario. It reads:

"We, the undersigned, oppose any plans to privatize TVOntario and strongly support TVO's proposal to convert the agency to a not-for-profit corporation. We, the undersigned, strongly urge the government of Ontario to ensure continued access by Wahsa and Wawatay radio to TVO's distribution system. The privatization of TVOntario would jeopardize the excellent educational and information programming provided by TVOntario. The sale of TVO to commercial interests would also jeopardize Wawatay radio network's native language programming, and Wahsa's distance education services, because both depend on TVO's distribution system."

I have attached my name to that petition as well.

RENT REGULATION

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned concerned citizens of Ontario, Canada, oppose the proposed amendments to the Human Rights Code contained in section 200 of Bill 96, the Tenant Protection Act.

"Section 200, which allows landlords to use income information to disqualify prospective tenants, will have a devastating impact on single mothers, the disabled, refugees, seniors and people receiving social assistance, among others. It will severely reduce the housing options for low-income individuals and families, increasing the number of households that are forced into homelessness or into overpriced accommodation.

"If section 200 of Bill 96 is not amended, the government of Ontario will be authorizing discrimination against people with low incomes.

"Thus we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that the words 'income information' be deleted from sections 36 and 200 of Bill 96."

Having presented an amendment to this effect to the bill, I am proud to affix my signature to this petition.

IPPERWASH PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas many questions concerning the events preceding, during and after the fatal shooting of Anthony Dudley George on September 6, 1995, at Ipperwash Provincial Park have not been answered; and

"Whereas the influence and communications of Lambton MPP Marcel Beaubien with the government have been verified through transcripts presented in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the trust of the portfolio of native affairs held by Attorney General Charles Harnick is compromised by his continual refusal for a full public inquiry into the events at Ipperwash;

"We, the undersigned, request that a full public inquiry be held into the events surrounding the fatal shooting of Dudley George on September 6, 1995, to eliminate all misconceptions held by and about the government."

I affix my signature to that.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have a petition to the Legislature of Ontario against fingerprinting on the part of Mike Harris. It reads:

"Whereas the Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, has proposed the fingerprinting of all Ontario citizens; and

"Whereas fingerprinting Ontarians was never promised in the Common Sense Revolution or in his election campaign; and

"Whereas universal fingerprinting of Ontario citizens is a direct violation of basic civil rights and fundamental rights of privacy; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government is intervening and intruding into all aspects of daily life, from megacities, user fees, rent controls and market value taxes, which he never promised in the election campaign;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to oppose Mike Harris's plan to fingerprint Ontario citizens, and to respect their privacy and to stop creating a mega-government that does not respect the basic freedom and individuality of the citizens of Ontario."

I've attached my name to that petition as well.

RENT REGULATION

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to take away the protections of the Rent Control Act; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to allow a landlord to charge a tenant who moves into an apartment whatever the landlord can get away with; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to raise the limit of how high rents can increase for all tenants; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to make it easier to demolish or convert existing affordable rental housing; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to take away the rent freeze which has been successful in forcing some landlords to repair their buildings;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to keep the existing rent laws which provide true protection for tenants in place."

I affix my signature to this petition.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, has proposed the fingerprinting of all Ontario citizens; and

"Whereas fingerprinting Ontarians was never promised in the Common Sense Revolution or in his election campaign; and

"Whereas universal fingerprinting of Ontario citizens is a direct violation of basic civil rights and fundamental rights of privacy; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government is intervening into all aspects of daily life, from megacities, user fees, rent controls and market value taxes, which he never promised in the election campaign;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to oppose Mike Harris's plan to fingerprint Ontario citizens, and to respect their privacy and to stop creating a mega-government that does not respect the basic freedom and individuality of the citizens of Ontario."

I affix my signature.

1510



ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size, when Bill 160 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be referred to the standing committee on administration of justice;

That the committee shall be authorized to meet to consider the bill for eight days during the next recess;

That all proposed amendments shall be tabled with the clerk of the committee by 5 pm on the seventh calendar day following the final day of consideration referred to in the previous paragraph;

That the committee shall further be authorized to meet for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill after routine proceedings until 6 pm, and from 7 pm to 9:30 pm, on the first regularly scheduled meeting day of the committee following the tabling of the proposed amendments;

That the committee shall further be authorized to meet for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill after routine proceedings on the second regularly scheduled meeting day of the committee following the tabling of the proposed amendments; and that the committee shall be authorized to meet beyond its normal hour of adjournment on that day until the completion of clause-by-clause consideration;

At 5 pm on that second day of clause-by-clause consideration, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any divisions required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 127(a);

That the committee shall report the bill to the House on the first sessional day that reports from committees may be received following the completion of clause-by-clause consideration. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on the date provided, the bill shall be deemed to have been passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House;

That, upon receiving the report of the standing committee on administration of justice, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading;

That one sessional day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill. At 5:45 pm or 9:15 pm as the case may be on such day, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment;

That the vote on third reading of the bill may, at the request of any chief whip of a recognized party in the House, be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding, "Deferred Votes";

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceeding on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 5 minutes.

Mr Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Middlesex, Mr Smith; the member for St Catharines-Brock, Mr Froese; and the member for Etobicoke-Rexdale, Mr Hastings.

This bill, which speaks to the quality of education in Ontario, is undoubtedly one of the more important pieces of legislation that will be considered by this House this year, perhaps during the term of this particular government. The desire of the government is to follow up on the consultations and the work of the ministry, and of the second reading debate that we've had in this House, some three days of second reading debate that have occurred, and now to take that consultation, that debate and the ministry work over quite a long period of time and send the bill to the committee to have public hearings.

That would take place during the recess period of this House so that the bill could be considered by the committee and the public will have an opportunity to speak to it, and the results of those public hearings will, of course, generate amendments. I'm sure there will be amendments to this bill, as there are to all bills. No matter which government is in place, there are always ways to improve the legislation. Those amendments go through the clause-by-clause and come back to this House for consideration later this fall.

I will say that some of the issues that have arisen and are being considered through this legislation are also the topic of a report I have in my hand from the Education Improvement Commission. The Education Improvement Commission, a committee of seven members, seven citizens of Ontario, was appointed some time ago to look at the state of education in the province and make certain recommendations. In August of this year, they came forward with a report and made a number of recommendations.

Of the two co-chairs of the Education Improvement Commission, one was a respected long-term member of this Legislature and a former Minister of Education under the NDP government, Mr Dave Cooke; and the other was Ann Vanstone, who has served as the chair of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board, again a person who has a great deal of respect in education circles in the province. They were supported by five other commissioners, people with abilities and talents in their own right, and together this group came forward with a number of recommendations.

Some of the issues they spoke to which are of concern to this government deal with, for example, the length of the school year. In many other jurisdictions, the Education Improvement Commission noted that the school year was longer than in Ontario. In Ontario the school year is apparently 185 days long, according to the commission, whereas in for example England, just to pick another country, 192 days; in Italy, 204 days; in Switzerland, 207 days. It is of concern to the Education Improvement Commission that we are not allocating enough days in the calendar year for the students. Perhaps there are some reasons for that, but the commission felt that situation should be addressed.

The commission made note of some of the factors involving the amount of time that is available for students in the classroom through the year. One of those considerations, for example, concerns professional activity days. I think we would all say that a certain number of professional days are necessary. Some of the days concern professional development for the staff themselves. The teachers need a certain amount of time to perhaps upgrade themselves, that sort of thing. Other days are associated with parent-teacher conferences, and certainly teachers need to have time to get together with parents to discuss items. However, there are about 10 PA days, I guess is their term today, and the commission felt that the days

should be set to five rather than 10, that five would be sufficient to perform that level of activity.

Another area concerned the number of examination days. Apparently in the secondary school level today there are some 15 examination days that are set aside, whereas the commission felt there should be a maximum of 10 days. Again, this is time that should be spent with the students.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): You are debating the bill. You are not telling us why we should be on a time allocation motion.

Hon David Johnson: I think my colleague opposite, the House leader for the third party, would say the students should have that time and bring up those 185 days they have available to learn.

The topic of preparation time was certainly researched by the commission, and the commission did some comparison, in terms of preparation time, with what is available in other jurisdictions. The fact is, at the secondary school level the commission has reported that teachers spend about 3.75 hours per day in the class, whereas in other jurisdictions, according to the report, the amount of time spent in the classroom is longer: in Manitoba, for example, almost five hours; in New Brunswick, four and a half hours. In all the other provinces at the secondary school level, the teachers spend four hours or more in the classroom per day, whereas in Ontario the amount of time spent by the secondary school teachers averages about 3.75 hours.

1520

The commission, in terms of recommendations in and around that area, has suggested that the preparation time at the secondary level be reduced by at least 25%. That's the recommendation of the Education Improvement Commission, that the preparation time at the secondary level be reduced by some 25%. They felt that the preparation time at the elementary school level was appropriate and that a reduction of some 25% would bring the secondary time to about what the elementary school time is and would still leave plenty of preparation time. I gather that is the recommendation from the Education Improvement Commission.

All of this adds up to a concern for the amount of time that is available to our students. We know we have excellent teachers and we know we have bright students and we know we've been spending a lot of money in the system, yet the results we are achieving on tests are not what we would hope for as parents and as residents of the province. I have the results of an international mathematics and science —

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): For our grade 4 students?

Hon David Johnson: Grade 8 students. The Ontario students scored under 55% in mathematics, in science scored about 57%. When I look at Canada in general, the students in Canada in general scored about 60% on both tests, which is higher than the Ontario level. In Alberta the students scored above 60% in both and in British Columbia almost 65% in science. This is of concern. When we see results like this, it's only natural for parents to have concern, for residents of the province to have concerns.

We have excellent teachers, we have bright students, and we spend a lot of money. Why are we not getting the results we should be achieving? If you take the report of the Education Improvement Commission, they would say that maybe the classes should be limited, that class size may be too large. Certainly this government feels the class sizes should not be allowed to get any larger. The amount of time available to the students is not what it should be. In other countries there are more days. Because of the system, the amount of time that teachers are able to spend in the classroom is certainly less than in all the other provinces, at the secondary school level in particular, less time than teachers are able to spend in provinces such as Quebec or Alberta or British Columbia. These are issues that need to be dealt with.

Then there is of course the general matter of funding the system. We had a few comments earlier this afternoon in question period about funding of the system. My experience over a number of years at the municipal level is that if there's one tax people are concerned about, it's the property tax, and it's the education component on that property tax. I have, as I'm sure all of us in this House have, been out knocking on doors and talking to constituents over many years, and when people say they're concerned about the tax and ask why the tax is still going up, nine times out of 10 they're talking about the property tax and nine times out of 10 it's the education component of the property tax that people are concerned about.

I remember that years ago — it seems like years ago, anyway. I guess it was about five years ago —

Mr Wildman: It's a good investment. One of those students might give you a heart transplant.

Hon David Johnson: It's a good investment if we're getting value. I say to the House leader for the third party that we're spending a lot of money, one of the highest in spending. Other than the province of Quebec, we spend more money per pupil on education than any —

Mr Wildman: That's not correct.

Hon David Johnson: It certainly is correct.

Mr Wildman: Per pupil we're 49th in North America.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Member for Algoma.

Hon David Johnson: I'd say to the House leader, include all the costs and you will see that except for a minor difference between us and Quebec — we spend a lot of money, we have excellent teachers, we have bright students, yet we're not scoring as well as we should.

If the taxpayers I'm talking to who are concerned about the huge amount of money on their property tax — and they have every right to be concerned — felt that we were scoring high on these tests and that our students were getting value, I think they would be more inclined to say: "Yes, I realize I'm spending a lot of money but I'm getting value for it. Our students are really doing well and we should be satisfied with that." But unfortunately, we

are not scoring in the highest ranks on these tests and as a result there is concern by the taxpayers.

Year after year I've encountered this. I remember years ago we did town hall meetings — I believe they still do them in East York — around budget time. What you would find was that there would always be somebody there to speak to the local municipal budget, there would always be somebody there to speak to the regional budget, which in this case is Metropolitan Toronto, and there would always be somebody to speak to the school board budget. Well, 90% of the questions would go to the school board representative; 90% of the questions on taxes —

Mr Wildman: That's why we need more school boards.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Algoma.

Hon David Johnson: — would go to the school board representative, because that's where people were concerned about the level of spending and not getting the best value for their dollar.

With the results of this Education Improvement Commission report, with Bill 160, with working with those involved in the education system, we will have a system where there will be still an immense amount of investment into and immense spending in the school system, but we will find that the students will have more time, we will find that our excellent teachers have more time with the students; we will find as a result that our students will have a better environment in which to learn, and they will learn more and do better on these tests and receive a better quality of education.

That's what the bottom line in this whole issue is about: to have a better system of education so that our students, our future in the province of Ontario, will have that opportunity to have the best possible education for the value and for the money the taxpayers are putting forward.

With those comments, having gone over my time already, I will sit down and allow the member for Middlesex to take over.

1530

Mr Bruce Smith (Middlesex): It's certainly a pleasure to speak on the time allocation motion today and lend my support for the motion that's been moved by the government House leader.

I would echo his comments and agree fully with him that this piece of legislation is obviously very important, and certainly the details and components of it cannot be taken lightly in terms of the reforms the government is anticipating with respect to education in this province.

I think what the motion allows us to do is take this bill to the next stage, the committee stage, where public hearings can be conducted and consultations can be held with respect to the merits of the bill, as well as the opportunity to consider possible amendments or changes that may be necessary to the legislation in terms of the feedback we receive or in terms of the feedback the minister receives from representatives of teachers' federations during his discussions with them this week.

As parliamentary assistant, I've had the opportunity to share in many of the discussions that have taken place and experience the comments and concerns and debate that have been presented by a number of members in this Legislature from various points of view. It's obviously a very passionate issue for many people in this Legislature. It's one that either brings us together or polarizes us, depending on the position you might hold with respect to the legislation itself.

Although I don't want to misrepresent the comments that were presented by the member for Dovercourt and the member for Renfrew North, both of whom are former ministers of education, I would say at the outset it was very clear that they both expressed concern in opposition to the bill, but I think as part of their debate they both recognized in a very articulate fashion the need for change in the education system in this province. Certainly, that's an important position for them to recognize as former ministers of the crown who held responsibility in a very important portfolio such as the Ministry of Education.

I disagree with the Leader of the Opposition today who requested the Minister of Education to put this bill on ice. I don't think that's the responsible action to deal with education in this province and one that I was glad to hear the minister reject in terms of his intention to deal with the changes that must occur.

We've had interesting debate in this House. It has ranged from various extremes, both emotional and very concise, in terms of some of the points of view various members have brought to the forefront in their capacities as members of the Legislature or as members who have had previous experience either as teaching professionals in this province or alternatively as trustees representing various boards of education. Certainly, they brought that experience to the forefront with respect to this legislation. I think that is valuable in terms of the input that is required to move ahead into the future.

I think one of the most important aspects that many have agreed upon is the extent to which this particular issue has been reviewed and studied in this province. We certainly see that since 1950 we've had some 24 separate reviews, two royal commissions, 10 additional commissions and two fact-finding reports in that period of time. I'm not questioning the merits or the motivation of why those reports were done. I trust that the governments of the day did so with the objective of bringing education reforms to this province and I think that provides us with a basis from which we can move forward into the future. Those studies serve as a very good piece of background in terms of what we need to do in the future and where we've been with respect to education in this province.

For those who suggest that education hasn't been reviewed, studied and debated, I would simply say that's not quite accurate in terms of the practice that has been experienced here. As many have seen, governments before us have placed the same importance on education reform, the difference being that the government of the day is prepared to move ahead and act responsibly in terms of bringing those changes to fruition.

The whole issue of education finance, curriculum and quality initiatives I think cannot be looked at in isolation

of this particular bill. Too often it's very easy to separate the two issues and try to distinguish between them, but I think they go hand in hand. I would certainly commend the minister's efforts in terms of trying to marry and bring along the quality initiatives at the same time as dealing with some of the tough issues centring around school board governance and the method by which education is financed in this province.

The Education Quality Improvement Act is not about money, and I would emphasize that, or necessarily reinvestments or a showdown with teachers. It's simply not about that. It's about improving the quality of education in this province, and I think that is an important premise for us to move ahead into the future.

As we indicated at the outset and as was talked about during the debate on this particular legislation, the government of Ontario fully recognizes that there will be some transitional issues that will be difficult to deal with. That is why the Minister of Education froze education spending at approximately $14 billion. That funding model will be implemented in September 1998, and during that transition period we have recognized the need to provide a stabilized funding environment. That, as well, has been complemented by a capital construction program of some $650 million.

Too often, it's not easily identifiable what a $650-million investment means, but on a localized basis that essentially equates to about 30,000 pupil places in this province. That's a fairly significant undertaking and one that is important in terms of the capital renewal that is necessary with respect to our schools in this province.

We budgeted in the spring budget $250 million in terms of our share of a proposed early retirement package with teachers in this province. We've seen an additional contribution of $100 million to OSAP, an additional $150 million to the Ontario student opportunity trust fund. So all aspects of the education portfolio are being dealt with, in my opinion, in a very positive way. I recognize the next phase of change is going to be difficult and one that requires some careful management.

In a nutshell, the key component to this is the funding aspect. I recognize that. We certainly know that problems existed with respect to how school boards were financed in the past, that there is inequity in the school system in terms of how different jurisdictions finance the services that students realize in this province.

I often remark, as I travel about the province, my observations: whether they're in a small rural board, a separate board, a public board, the challenges they face in terms of any equity of new opportunities to be realized in the school environment; versus those communities where there's greater access to a more vibrant assessment base; versus those communities that have a very strong assessment base which enables them to provide a higher level of service to students in those particular communities. Those are the issues we see and the issues that are very important and critical in terms of the new funding direction that would be anticipated in the fall of 1998.

From the outset we have heard teachers speak about their concerns. We heard their concerns about the changes to the secondary school year, the implementation date, their position on curriculum, their position on destreaming and streaming. Those are things we've responded to by taking a step back and realizing that we have to take a little bit longer to implement those changes. We continue to work, in my opinion, in a very positive fashion in terms of bringing forth a new curriculum for secondary schools in this province, and we continue to work on a new curriculum for the elementary panel with respect to the remaining subject areas of science, technology, history and geography.

Those are the quality initiatives that, as I said earlier, can't be looked at in isolation of some of the major initiatives that are currently taking place with respect to the manner in which schools are operated and funded.

We heard from teachers as well, and I in my own office, the position articulated by principals and vice-principals on the elementary panel that they need not be pulled out of the federation to contribute to the quality agenda, that they were front-line leaders in terms of their school environment and had the ability and wherewithal and professionalism to deal with that. That's a position I fully accept and one the government recognized. We heard the position of federations that we need not remove the right to strike or eliminate the choice of affiliation with respect to teachers and their choice of federation. We heard and responded to that.

Now we're moving to the next stage of this legislation in Bill 160. All sides, whether it's teachers, government, opposition, can learn from this experience, and the experience I have had is that there's a need for more information. The committee process will allow us to gain additional information. Certainly the teachers I've talked to have some legitimate concerns. They also have concerns that are not really founded in any of the contents of Bill 160, and that's the exchange of information that needs to occur as we move into the next stage of debate on this bill.

We've seen that the system is rather arbitrary, to some extent unfair, and certainly by design it's not achieving the results we want. That's not an attack on teachers. It's a recognition that the system itself needs some changes. I must say that became very apparent to me as I had the opportunity to represent the minister among his other provincial colleagues at a recent conference where we had the opportunity to share different ideas and experiences. I must say that Ontario, while there are many opportunities for change, certainly is behind other major jurisdictions. When I look to Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, each provincial jurisdiction is actually in the next phase of its education reform agenda. It's my firm belief that Ontario should be the leader of that reform agenda and not in the position it is in today.

The government has very clearly said that the time has now come to act, that changes must occur, that whether you live in Ottawa, Thunder Bay or London, Ontario, the

opportunities presented to you within the education system must be the same. This bill is in part about that; it's about setting the framework and, yes, the regulatory powers for ministers to deal with specific issues, be it prep time, length of school year or the method by which the system is to be financed. Those items are in the bill, I recognize that, but by and large this bill provides a framework that needs further discussion, that needs further input, and I fully suspect we will receive that over the course of the committee hearings in this province in the next month or so.

I recognize that my colleagues also would like to make some comments this afternoon concerning the motion itself and, with that, would conclude by thanking you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to briefly address some of these comments and reiterate the government's commitment to bring a fair funding system to all students in this province, to provide for a leaner governance structure with respect to school boards in this province and to provide, wherever possible, the needed resources required to complete the classroom experience both for the pupil and for the teaching professional in that place.

1540

Mr Tom Froese (St Catharines-Brock): I'm pleased to rise to speak on the time allocation motion with respect to Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size. As we brought forward this bill, in the time leading up to it and now, we're seeing that there's a lot of misinformation going around the province. I would like to give one example of that.

I have an article here that was in the Ottawa Sun. It's an editorial, actually. It's called "Wool." I'm just going to take excerpts from that document:

"Are union executives pulling the wool over the eyes of their...teachers in their desperate pursuit of the illegal strike which currently looms over the horizon?

"Indeed they are, sir — and more than three bags full.

"In a document sent out to teachers across the province — the one titled Tory Teacher Legislation — the Ontario Teachers' Federation pulled the following on its rank and file.

"It told teachers that 'it is the intent of the government to cut elementary teachers' preparation time in half,' with the result of less time for pupil-parent consultation, less time for curriculum development, loss of teaching positions upwards of 10,000."

This is totally false. That's not what the bill does. It goes on to say, "The Ontario Teachers' Federation told teachers that 'the government has proposed a 1% rollback and the reduction in benefit coverage by 10%,' with the result that the teachers will 'lose (upwards) to $600 a year,' plus money in benefit premiums which will now have to be paid by them." Totally incorrect.

It goes on to explain what the union executives are telling the teachers across the province. It's totally incorrect. It's not true at all. So there's a lot of misinformation out there.

I'd like to bring us back to June 1995 and the campaign —

Mrs McLeod: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think the speakers have been quite rigorous about challenging the use of the term "not true," and I think the member just used that term.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn't hear it, so it's very difficult for me to rule on it. Did you say anything you feel was out of order?

Mr Froese: I was referring to an article in the paper.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you feel you've said something which was contrary to procedures?

Mr Froese: To go back to June 1995 and the election campaign that led up to the election, if we look at what our government said in its party platform, we see that our government is doing what it said it would do.

I'd just like to quote some of the things that were written in the Common Sense Revolution. Under "Reform Education" it says, "For years now, we have been spending more and more on education, but getting less and less in the classroom." Down a little farther on the page it says, "We believe Ontario's education system is in need of system-wide reform, based on the principles of providing opportunity to students, excellence in curriculum and teachers, and accountability to parents and taxpayers."

We talked about setting goals or setting priorities: "A large part of the problem is how little of our education investment actually reaches the classroom. Under this plan we will move to a system of 'classroom-based budgeting.'

"A greater share of our education spending must go to children in the classroom, not to 'edu-crats,' consultants and managers."

We also talked about core curriculum. "With a core curriculum set province-wide, and standardized testing at all levels, we know that we can spend more efficiently, while improving the quality of education we offer to students. Central to this reform will be increased autonomy and decision-making for each school, and a significantly increased role for parents and community leaders."

While I'm talking about this, we see that's what's going to be in Bill 160. Bill 160 is enabling legislation to make all of this happen. We talked about the number of school years. We also talked about increasing the number of school days. What we said leading up to the election in June 1995 we are implementing in the bill.

If we go to the Liberal red book during that campaign, they said similar things to what I just read and what we're implementing. On page 40 of the red book: "A Liberal government will bring in a core program and test students in vital areas such as reading, writing, and math. We will give community groups, especially parents, a chance to become more involved in schooling. And we will spend more of our precious education dollars on classroom learning and less on administration."

It goes on to say on page 45: "We must make sure that we are getting value for our dollar. As much as possible,

our education dollars must be spent on classroom learning rather than administration.

"The creation of a provincial core curriculum will help save money by eliminating the need for individual boards of education to develop their own core curriculums." They talk about reducing trustees and placing caps on it.

When we go to the Royal Commission on Learning, which was mandated by the former NDP government, they reviewed four areas: accountability, governance, program curriculum and a shared vision. They wanted a shared vision of elementary and secondary education in Ontario. Some of that said the same things the Common Sense Revolution and the red book said as well: a provincial report card. The recommendations were: a high-quality, consistent curriculum; standards for student achievement in English and math in grades 1 to 8; the establishment of a College of Teachers; establishing mandatory school councils; increasing parent involvement; developing a fair funding system. Where have we heard that?

We were saying all the same things. There have been numerous studies. It's a wonder that the opposition now stands up and is critical of this government with respect to what's in Bill 160 because we're doing what we said we'd do. There have been numerous studies. The difference is that our government is finally making the tough decisions to make this happen. We said there has been enough studying done, there has been enough debate; we need to do what we said we were going to do, and we need to make those recommendations.

Then we engaged the Education Improvement Commission, and they came up with recommendations with all the other studies. Mr Cooke and Ms Vanstone finally saw a government that was going to do what it said it was going to do. That's why we have the Education Improvement Commission. A number of their recommendations have come to the government, including the funding formula, how to deal with that; not to increase class sizes beyond the current level; reduce preparation time at the secondary level by at least 25%.

1550

Everybody knows that changes need to be made. We've consulted more than any other government in the last 10 years on these issues and we continue to consult and to listen. As a matter of fact, I met with teachers' federation representatives this morning in my office before I came here to Toronto. On Wednesday, the minister will meet with union reps as well. Hopefully they will be able to come to an agreement on the changes that need to be made that everybody has been saying.

Bill 160 is not about teacher-bashing; it's about finding ways to increase quality and accountability, but at a cost that is sustainable. We're doing more for less. It's not just a saying. We promise to provide the best possible service for the best possible price. That's not teacher-bashing. The minute the government or the taxpayers ask for finding new ways of doing things, it's immediately interpreted as teacher-bashing, but it's not.

I have tremendous respect for the teachers, especially those who are teaching my children in our schools in the area of St Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake, but that doesn't mean to say the system is perfect. I know we all agree that the system isn't perfect. We need to find creative solutions and relook at how education is to answer the needs and revitalize the education system.

Bill 160 is not about gutting the education system. Actually, it's quite the reverse. We're finding new ways to raise the quality and accountability, and we're rebuilding. We're saying that the resources need to be in the classrooms, not in buildings, not in board buildings, not in administration. They need to go to the kids and the teachers in the classroom.

We talk about class size as well in the bill, and the recommendations from the Education Improvement Commission. These things should not be in the collective bargaining agreement.

The curriculum needs to be specific as well. It needs to be updated, to be relevant for the 21st century.

The bill is not — again, it's misinformation — about replacing qualified teachers. We never said we were going to do that. In fact, it's about supplementing the teachers and having a team approach to teaching. We're already seeing that in our boards: library technicians, computer programming, music programs, job search and guidance. Teachers are still in charge of the curriculum.

This bill is about moving ahead, it's about taking standards out of the collective bargaining agreement, it's about bringing smooth school board integration and, most important, it's about focusing our children and our children's future.

I would like to continue, but I know the member for Etobicoke-Rexdale would like to say a few words.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke-Rexdale): It's interesting to join in this debate. I use that word advisedly because in this House we don't seem to get, except perhaps in private members' hour, real exchanges of differences over ideas, over different perspectives, over the offering of alternative policies. Very seldom do we hear that kind of approach from the opposition parties. It has come occasionally. The member for Ottawa Centre has voiced some alternatives regarding Workers' Compensation Board reform, but it is truly a rare instance.

Therefore, it's important to place on the record what exactly is in Bill 160. What is the nature of education reform in the province of Ontario today? As the preceding speaker, the member for St Catharines-Brock, who is immersed in the education stuff much more than I am in terms of seeing all the issues, alluded to, it seems to me we need to look at some of the issues this government has tried to deal with since it got elected.

It has kept its word in many instances. I know there is a great deal of cynicism about politicos by members of the general public, but I think on the nature of education reform we have attempted to carry through exactly what we said we would try to do in the Common Sense Revolution. I would briefly like to review, for the record, exactly what some of those broad-based proposals were and what we have done in terms of implementing them.

For example, we stated that we would introduce a standardized report card. Have we done so? Yes. The Ministry of Education and Training has introduced a standardized report card, replacing the more generalized, anecdotal form of report that so many parents were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with. If you don't believe what I have to say, all that members opposite have to do is go out and test and find out from those members of the public, those concerned parents who are members of either parent-teacher associations or the newly appointed school advisory councils, that an anecdotal description of some elementary student's reading capacity was completely insufficient. Parents want to know exactly or as close as possible where their child stands vis-à-vis the other children in that particular subject matter in that particular grade. That's what we have accomplished with the standardized report card.

Some of the school boards, to their credit, did develop a self-assessment in terms of replacing what they saw even before we got to the point of introducing a standardized report card in Ontario. The Etobicoke Board of Education, to its credit, through the push of some trustees on that board for many years, finally got a replacement of the anecdotal description of what their students were doing academically. That partially satisfied the parents', and in this case the customers', need to find out where their child stood. All you have to do is look at that particular problem and say, "Was there widespread dissatisfaction with the anecdotal approach to reporting on students' progress, students' achievement in Ontario?" Absolutely, there was.

Mr Wildman: Speak to the motion.

Mr Hastings: Isn't it interesting that the member for Algoma is the first to urge us to speak to the motion, yet when it comes to talking about Bill 160, they talk about the kitchen sink and not the stuff that's in here, need I remind you, Speaker?

We have followed through on a standardized report card which I think probably will go through some refinements until we get it pretty close to right. That was the first subject.

Another subject that was raised in the Common Sense Revolution related to the dissatisfaction parents, even teachers, had with the common curriculum. They wanted some change in it. So what has this government done through the Ministry of Education and Training? They set about to introduce specific, precise guidelines dealing with language development and mathematics. There are expected specific outcomes to be achieved by teachers in grades 1 through 8 in terms of language and in terms of mathematics or numeracy skills.

Why was that essential? Undoubtedly it goes back to a broad-based public perception of and dissatisfaction with the nature of the teaching of those two subjects: language arts and mathematics. How can that be confirmed? It can be confirmed not only by parents but by employers. Most of the members of this House at one point or another in their career, however long that has been politically, have met with employers — small business people, presidents of the larger corporations, what have you, the convenience store operator who is trying to hire a student for the summer — who needed to have from them some kind of curriculum résumé.

Where were those students coming from? Had they worked in other places? What kind of results had they achieved? What kind of letters had they written? Personally, I have seen letters from many school boards that evidenced very clearly the inadequacy of language in terms of being able to express yourself clearly, concisely and succinctly about what you are trying to write in a letter if you were applying for a job.

1600

The system is the problem at the heart of this whole challenge; it's not the teachers per se. Sure, there are some teachers who have become lackadaisical about how they have approached learning and teaching, but by far the vast majority, I believe — and I have met many of them — are working in a system that does need some fundamental change, despite the claims of the opposition that we should continue with the status quo. We have just cited two specific examples — the dissatisfaction with the anecdotal form of reporting throughout this province and the inadequacies found in language and mathematics — and we have addressed both of those.

There is a third specific reform that was introduced about a year ago. There was a great deal of controversy over that. The folks who were on the other side said it wasn't necessary, and yet there were recommendations out of the Royal Commission on Learning, many of which are refocused in The Road Ahead, and specifically the College of Teachers, which was passed approximately a year ago by this government, into which the teachers have to pay a fee of approximately $90 to $120 to run that operation.

What is its purpose? Its purpose is to enhance the professionalism of all the teaching professionals in this province, whether they be in the separate or public school situations, whether they be in the elementary or secondary school panels. I think over time it will be shown that the College of Teachers will achieve those objectives in terms of competency and in terms of producing a results outcome type of situation for testing and retesting the merits and the competency of teachers in this province. Not only is that essential, it's mandatory. We have done that.

There are lots of other things we have set out in the Common Sense Revolution, and we have gone a good distance, if not having completed. We have changed the nature of education financing in this province. That's exactly what the public was telling us for years and years. If you look at seniors in this province who want to remain in their homes, they kept saying, "Why is it necessary that I continue to pay education taxes on my property assessment?"

What did we do? We changed the basis of education financing in this province, and it will be found in Bill 160, in terms of the mechanics implementation. We have taken 50% off the property taxes, and that is going to mean an enormous relief to many seniors in this province who had been asking members of the two previous governments to do that. They were even asking long before that, back in

the days of the Robarts and Davis administrations. Finally, we have a government that has undertaken that commitment and has lived up to it. That's probably the key arch, the key fundamental in terms of education reform in this province.

When you turn to some of the topics that you find in the whole of Bill 160 which people are getting extremely exercised over simply because — I've had many people call my constituency office to find out if they could get some copies of it, and we have been able to provide them with some. I asked them, "When you have gone through any parts of it or the whole product, let me know what you think of what's in the bill compared with what you're hearing."

It's interesting to hear back from some of these. I have heard back from three folks now who have said they have gone through portions of it but not the whole thing, and they were surprised to learn that some of the things in here are about as dry as dishwater, that when you look at the mechanics of implementation, there is no controversy about them. Case in point: The qualifications to be elected as a school trustee in this province are laid out very clearly. The qualifications to be a voter are laid out very clearly, and I will get to those very shortly.

What else do you find in this bill? Without going into a lot of the articles dealing with each section, it's very clear that part I of the bill — I want to put this on the record, because there doesn't seem to have been any other time we have done this in terms of letting people who are reading it or want to get a copy of Bill 160 know what's in it — deals with the founding of the Ministry of Education and Training. It amends certain bills. It lays out the responsibilities of the minister. Part II of the act deals with attendance rights, and it points out what is to be established under the attendance rights of pupils: "The amendments recast the current attendance rights in light of the new governance and finance provisions. As well, section 10 of the bill amends section 19 of the act to deal with school closing in the event" — unfortunately — "of a strike or a lockout."

Part II.1 deals with miscellaneous.

Part II.2 of the act deals with the establishment of district school boards, and this part of the legislation outlines the specifics, the mechanics for how the amalgamated school boards in Ontario will function — their bylaws, their charter, their responsibilities. If we recall education history, a former member of the Peterson government, who I believe was appointed by the previous administration, went to undertake a scrutiny, an analysis, an examination of the number of school boards in this province. There were at least two reports emanating from that honourable member, and this particular government has heeded some of the recommendations. The thrust of the report, reduced to its essence, was to reduce the number of school boards. What has happened? We have reduced the number of school boards from approximately 168 down to about 76, I believe, because there were an additional six added after some changes due to the geography concerns raised by residents of northern Ontario.

Here is another example of this government's responsiveness to that issue. If we hadn't done it, they would have said: "These organizations are way too large. You have ignored certain Franco-Ontarian elements. You have ignored certain interests of the Catholic community." What did we do? We responded. So here is another example of what was set out in the Common Sense Revolution.

It's quite obvious that the members opposite probably still maintain that the best system is the existing number of school boards, 168, because we certainly haven't heard from them in any of this so-called conflict or clash of ideas as to whether they really do favour the exact number of school boards in existence today. We haven't heard anything about that, and they have failed to make the case as to the rationale for keeping the number of school boards. I wonder why, if one of the possible justifications would be that they would be contradicting particularly the official opposition, the minister who made these recommendations back in the early 1990s. It's very interesting why there has been silence on this issue. Do they prefer the exact number of school boards they have now?

Continuing, not only does this bill deal with the rationale for the Ministry of Education and Training, not only does it lay out attendance rights for students, not only does it lay out district school boards and how they are to operate, how employees' rights from the old existing school boards will continue through this bill into the new amalgamated boards, whether it be in Metropolitan Toronto or northwestern Ontario or eastern Ontario, there has been an argument at the heart of this debate — for those folks who haven't read the bill or any sections of the bill — and I think the contention is that the whole thrust of Bill 160, from comments I heard through the member for Brampton South in an exchange he had last week on cable television, is that this government is out to destroy public education.

1610

The boldness of that assertion has to be challenged because on this side of the House, as there is on that side, there are all these folks here who are members of this House, whether you be a member of the government or a member of the third party or the official opposition. Those members are fathers, those members are mothers or grandparents, whatever the case may be.

You have to ask yourself if you're a member of this government and you have children in the public or separate school systems of this province, what godly justification would there be to the assertion that this bill sets out to destroy public education? It does nothing of the kind, because there's nothing in the bill, there's not a section — and I'd like to see the members opposite when they get to present their side of the argument tell us what section of the bill sets out the public destruction of the education system, because that purely shows the lackadaisical, lazy thinking of members opposite who would join in any critics who make that assertion.

It is not about the public destruction of the education system in this province. This bill deals with the reconstruction, with the reform of many of the things that

have been plaguing the education system of this province for many, many years. How do we know that again? All you've got to do is talk to parents, not all parents but a sufficient majority of parents and grandparents who are concerned about the futures of their children and of their grandchildren. If you ignore the problems in the system and let them just fester, what will be the ultimate result if you didn't have Bill 160?

You're going to end up with a group of folks, at least a large number out there, whom you can see when you visit any school — and I've visited a good number of schools, both Catholic and public, in Metropolitan Toronto, more so in the city of Etobicoke, in the new city of Toronto, and I have seen that many, many people are not satisfied with the way education has proceeded.

Mrs McLeod: Mr Speaker, I believe there is an agreement that we can split our time and I'll be splitting my time this afternoon with the member for Oakwood and with our leader, the member for Ottawa South.

This is a time allocation motion before us today. This isn't even a debate on Bill 160 any more. This is a debate about closing off any further debate on Bill 160. This is provocative beyond imagining, coming at this particularly sensitive moment in the history of relationships between teachers and this government, at a time when this government has repeatedly said through the mouths of its Premier and its Minister of Education: "Oh, yes, we're ready to talk. We've invited teachers to come in and sit down and talk with us. We don't want a strike. We don't believe there's going to be a strike. Why won't the teachers come in and sit down, and we'll talk with them?"

After saying that over and over again last week and over the course of the weekend, what do we see on Monday afternoon but a time allocation motion to cut off debate on this very bill that is pushing teachers up against the wall and bringing education in this province to the very edge of a precipice. It seems quite clear with this cutting off of debate that the government is prepared to give that final push over the edge.

This time allocation motion would be bad enough even if we weren't on the verge of a strike by 126,000 teachers, an absolutely unprecedented action by a group of people who have been driven to that kind of desperation in the need to make their voices and their concerns for education heard. Even if it weren't that particular moment in time, to cut off debate on a bill that is this controversial, that brings about these kinds of sweeping changes, that paves the way, in my view and I hold this view firmly, for the potential destruction of public education in this province, to cut off debate on this bill at this point of time is offensive to this place.

I notice that the government members who have spoken on supposedly the time allocation motion this afternoon have been rather desperate to put their own spin on this bill, to give the government spin as to why Bill 160 is needed, as to why it might be good. I suggest that much of the information they have been provided with by the Ministry of Education is not borne out by the facts and certainly does not present the whole story.

I also note that the members tend not to speak about anything that is related to Bill 160 at all. They're not even trying to put the spin on Bill 160. They're wanting to talk about curriculum and they're wanting to talk about report cards. That's fine. Let's come into the House, let's talk about report cards and curriculum, but it has nothing to do with Bill 160. There's nothing in this bill that relates in any way to report cards or to curriculum, and there is certainly nothing in the discussion about curriculum or report cards or even attempting to put some spin on why Bill 160 might be needed that has anything to do with government's reasons for cutting off debate this afternoon. That's what the issue is today: the sheer provocation of cutting off debate on a bill that is going to present us with such a crisis over the course of the next weeks.

You have to ask once again, why is this government in such a rush? I think we can probably recognize that it is again the bully government, ready to ram through its agenda, wanting to get it through in a hurry. After all, the clock is ticking for the government because it's getting closer and closer. We're past the half-way mark, closer and closer to the next election campaign. They want to do all their nasty stuff, they want to get all the conflict and the confrontation over with early. The clock is ticking. They've got to get these nasty bills done. They know very well that this is not good news. You don't cut off debate on a bill that you really believe is good news. So you get the nasty stuff done early, in a hurry to ram through the agenda, in a hurry to create the chaos that we know is coming.

I also recognize that the government is in a hurry for other reasons. They're in a hurry because they have another bill that's already passed out there, the bill on the amalgamation of school boards. It takes effect on January 1. Do you know what happens when they amalgamate school boards? We tried to have this debate last January, February, March. The government wasn't prepared to listen then. But what happens on January 1 is that these new megaboards take over and there is a temporary transfer of the employment of teachers to the new megaboards.

But do you know what else happens on January 1? Those contracts that are in place have to be renegotiated. Every teacher contract in this province, every school board employee's contract in this province has to be renegotiated beginning January 1 and the negotiations have to be completed by September 1.

This is a recipe for chaos beyond anything we have yet begun to imagine. Every board in the province negotiating every contract, all in the same time frame, all of the contracts, if they're not successfully renegotiated, expiring as of September 1, and those negotiations having to take place under the terms and conditions set out in Bill 60 and under the terms and conditions of this government having taken total control centrally of every decision that affects education. I suggest to you that those negotiations cannot be conducted in any reasonably good faith manner, so it is a recipe for chaos. Yes, the clock is ticking on the chaotic time lines that this government has introduced.

I think there's a rush too because the government knows very well that it needs the taxing powers that are in Bill 160. Government members don't like to talk about the taxing powers that are in Bill 160. After all, this is the same government that was going to take education tax completely off residential property.

They couldn't do that, so the government is now going to tax property for education itself. They're about to bring in their uniform mill rate. It all becomes part of the downloading of additional costs on the property tax base so that this government can begin to find its money to pay for its tax cut. It's in a rush to get its taxing powers so it can go out and raise money for education on the property tax base, even though it said it was going to relieve the property tax base of the cost of education.

But I still don't understand why there is that rush, because I know that as of last week, when it came to the commercial assessment — because remember, this government never did intend taking education off the commercial property tax base. The businesses in our communities were still going to have to pay 100% of their share of educational costs. This government is taking over the taxing of your businesses in your community to pay for education but it still, as of last week, has no plan as to how to do that. They've admitted that. They don't have the plan. They don't have the numbers. They don't know what it's going to cost the communities, either residences or businesses, but they're in a hurry just to get the power.

We have no idea what they're going to do with it. It would be nice just once from this government to see what they're going to do with these powers, to see what the impact is going to be, to see the numbers, but when you have a government that doesn't even have a plan for how they're going to use the power, we understand why they can't give us any numbers. But they're still in a rush.

1620

The real reason — for the distress, for the anger and for the frustration — this time allocation motion is before us today is because it will push teachers in this province into a position where they feel they have no choice but to strike.

I find it truly incredible that the Minister of Education in the House this afternoon could have been on his feet in response to a question from our leader, Dalton McGuinty, who said, "Set the bill aside until there can be some very real discussions," and the Minister of Education assured our leader that he was going to meet with representatives of teacher federations later this week.

Teachers may be on strike later this week; kids may be out of their classrooms later this week. The government's time allocation motion is here today. If the minister is going to meet with teacher representatives later this week, why didn't he stop this time allocation motion from going through at least until later this week? How could any teacher representative out there possibly believe that there will be any sincerity to these so-called discussions that are to go on with the Minister of Education when the very day that he says he's going to meet with them, his government brings forward a motion to cut off debate on the very bill that is pushing them into strike action?

This government is without any doubt at all forcing a confrontation and is going to be leaving teachers with absolutely no alternative but to protest in every way they have the actions of this government. I don't think they can possibly take a government seriously when day after day the public statements of the Minister of Education and the Premier of this province have been simply to lay down ultimatums.

We have to go back and remember how these so-called discussions with teacher federations, teacher representatives began. They began by sitting down at a table where the government laid down the bottom lines. The bottom lines were the words, "Yes, we want to provide a quality of education," and the second line, which the members opposite seem to want to ignore, was that they want to do that at the lowest possible cost. Define "lowest possible cost" for this government. Let's be absolutely clear about it. At that discussion table it was "nothing more to be spent than what was spent at the national average per pupil."

The government has defined its national average; they've defined the lowest possible cost. They have used, in my view, numbers which are erroneous, which are not based on fact, but they have said that to get down to the national average spending per pupil, we can take another $1 billion to $1.3 billion out of the system. I say again that at the discussion with teachers three weeks ago, the bottom line was, "We are not prepared to spend anything more than the national average." That translates very simply into taking another $1 billion out of education in this province.

The teachers tried, and I don't think it was with full consensus of all their members or their affiliates, but the teachers said: "We really don't want to go on strike. We don't want to be pushed to that extreme. We need some breathing time to at least try and get this government to truly sit down and talk with us and understand our concerns for education, our concerns for our students.

"We don't like the government's $5-billion tax cut plan. We never agreed with that. We don't think there should be a single cent from education contributed to the government's tax cut plan. But we don't want our students to be placed in jeopardy. Let's look at the alternative of temporarily using some teachers' pension fund to at least buy some time to look at the government's funding formula, to see what the government is going to do with funding, to see, maybe the government will actually live up to the minister's words and provide enough dollars for education that the needs of students can be met."

If the minister was really prepared to live up to those words by putting dollars on the table instead of taking dollars out of education, then maybe we could avoid this whole confrontation. The government said no. The government said: "Our bottom lines are still that we need $1 billion and we want long-term structural change. We want teachers out."

Let there be absolutely no mistake that this bill is about the government getting the power to do whatever it wants to do. This bill is about the government getting the power to reduce the number of teachers and to save money by cutting the number of teachers we have. If there is any doubt in anybody's mind, I take you back again to January 1997, when the government went to great efforts to send out focus groups to test how the public would respond to the removal of 10,000 teachers. Here's the headline: "Ontario Worked on Plan to Drop 10,000 Teachers."

What did they find when they tried to test this plan with the public not quite a year ago? They found, according to their consultant, "It's going to be trickier than expected." They said, "The issue will require significant managing, since without effective arguments there is likely to be some support for the teachers' position." The focus groups believed that "preparation time is a necessary function for teachers, that it's reasonable for teachers to be paid for it, that reducing it could compromise the quality of education. But through a series of arguments that they can present, this attitude can be changed."

That's what all the preamble to Bill 160 is, all the government spin. It's how you present arguments, whether based on the realities of what teachers are doing with students in our schools or not. It is to present arguments to try and convince the public that we can lose 10,000 teachers and somehow not hurt our students and their education.

I guess the government got a little bit nervous about the public's concern with 10,000 teachers being lost, so last week the minister said: "It's not really 10,000. We're not really going to cut 10,000 teachers, at least not tomorrow. Tomorrow we're only going to cut 4,400 teachers." It was at least the first acknowledgement we've had that this bill and this government's intent are all about having fewer teachers in our classrooms and fewer teachers working with our students.

Don't talk to me about teachers having more time with students. The bottom line is that there's less money and there are fewer teachers. There is going to be less teaching of students. You can't get away from the bottom line of that equation.

This government has been told over and over again by its own commission — the government House leader, in introducing this time allocation motion today, said that the government was just following the recommendations of the education implementation commission that it had set up.

There was one very significant recommendation of the commission. It's a little bit like reading the platform I put out for education a couple of years ago or better, which I would love to have been able to implement, and not mentioning the fact that there are two fairly crucial things in that platform.

One is that it says there have been far too many changes introduced without consultation with teachers and that has to stop. I wish the government understood what real consultation with teachers was all about, what really sitting down and talking to teachers about what will work with their students in their classrooms really means.

The second thing the government doesn't like to talk about is the fact that we said there should be stable multi-year funding for four years. If we had stable multi-year funding, and not $533 million in cuts on top of making permanent the $425 million in social contract cuts, if we'd had that kind of stable funding, then we wouldn't have 126,000 teachers looking at having to go on strike to try and protect the quality of education in this province against this government's attacks on it.

They don't like to read everything their commission said either. They don't like to realize that their minister is going far beyond what the commission suggested might be managed even in the area of preparation time. They certainly don't like to talk about the fact that the commission said loudly and clearly: "There cannot be more cuts to education. You must reinvest every cent you take out back in the classroom."

Why doesn't the government talk about that? Why, when my leader asks day in and day out for the minister to make that simple commitment — "Do not take another cent out of education" — will the minister not respond? He talks about the funding formula, he talks about quality education and meeting the needs of every student, and it sounds wonderful, except that until he shows us the dollars, nobody believes it's going to happen. Until he's prepared to make that basic commitment that our leader has asked for, that there won't be more cuts to education, we know he cannot meet the needs of students.

The government doesn't like to talk about that. They don't like to talk about how many more teachers, beyond the initial 4,400, this government's cuts are going to mean. They don't like to talk about the fact that more than the 4,400 teachers are going to be lost when they start replacing certified classroom teachers with uncertified teachers.

I think the parliamentary assistant for education said: "That's not going to happen. We're not talking about replacing teachers; we're talking about supplementing them." Surely that's not what his briefing note said, because that's not what the commission that reported to the minister has suggested. They've said, "Replace classroom teachers in art and music and physical education and technical programs, as well as in libraries and in early childhood." That's replacement of teachers, and it means fewer teachers, it means less cost indeed, but it means fewer professional teachers teaching our children.

1630

This week, the parliamentary assistant for education and the minister responsible for women's issues — I'm not sure why the minister for women's issues is up talking about reinvesting money in education when the Minister of Education has steadfastly refused to do that — have said: "We will reinvest. If the teachers will agree to some of our conditions, we will reinvest." But they didn't talk about reinvesting in teachers. They talked about reinvesting in training programs, in co-op programs. These are good things. Nobody is going to argue with the value of workplace training in preparation for the world of work.

But you cannot do it at the expense of the teachers who are needed to provide a quality elementary and secondary school education to our students in the classroom and out of the classroom.

I thought the provocation of this government had reached its peak last week when the Premier said, "You cannot trust teachers and trustees when it comes to quality education." If that wasn't the most provocative, inflammatory statement that could be made, at the same time as the government representatives were saying to teachers: "Come in and sit down and talk to us. We don't want you to go on strike. Come and talk to us." I think this government is forcing teachers into a confrontation, forcing teachers into this kind of fight, when the Premier of this province will make that kind of statement in this sort of heated environment.

I am not going to go into the facts and the total picture of what actually happens as the reason, the background, for increased class sizes. I've had a chance to raise my concerns with the statements the Premier has made and with his failure to acknowledge that the reason there are higher class sizes is as a direct result of the cuts this government has made — cuts to junior kindergarten, cuts to the operating grants to school boards — and that the need to deal with those cuts is what has driven class sizes up.

The Premier's attempt to justify this bill that's in front of us by suggesting that it is needed because school boards and teacher representatives have negotiated larger class sizes was so far removed from the reality of what goes on at those bargaining tables as to be something which I have not yet found parliamentary language to express, so I won't attempt to do that today.

The Minister of Education actually said a week ago that this bill has a lot of improvements for teachers. Where? Where are the improvements for teachers? Fewer jobs, non-certified people taking on the jobs of teachers, no ability to negotiate their working conditions. The Minister of Education, in my view and in the view of those thousands and thousands of teachers, 126,000 teachers, is determined to destroy public education. Where is there anything in Bill 160 that has a lot of improvements for teachers?

We have to remember that the working conditions of teachers are indeed the learning conditions of our students. That's why there are thousands and thousands of students who are protesting with their teachers, because they see, day in and day out, two things. They see what the cuts of this government have done to their classrooms, and they know the value of their teachers and the time their teachers spend with them in class and out of class. Students are saying as clearly as they can: "We want a voice, and we want our voice heard. We want this government to hear us say, 'Stop the cuts and leave our teachers in the schools to do the job that we value.'" They only wish the government valued that job.

We need to see the government make a commitment that it is not going to make any more cuts to education. If they would just make that basic commitment, I think we would be in a position where people could step back from the confrontation, where we could look at what the needs are and how to address those needs with at least some sense of stability in funding. But instead of that, we have a minister who continues to just talk. We have a minister who keeps mouthing rhetoric, even as he tells other people to drop it. We have a minister who makes no commitment to no more cuts, who is not going to show us the funding formula perhaps until it is too late to avoid a confrontation, and who even if he does show us the funding formula may not put any numbers to it that will allow us to see whether or not there are really going to be efforts made to provide enough resources to meet the needs of students.

Until this Minister of Education and this Premier and this government do that, until they make a clear commitment that there will not be any further cuts, no one is going to believe them when they say this is all about improving the quality of education.

They want to make this an issue of trust, that you can't trust teachers and trustees. My goodness, if anybody has destroyed trust, it is this government when it comes to their commitment to education. They have destroyed trust with $533 million of cuts, including direct cuts of $145 million to junior kindergarten and 50% less funding for adult education and direct cuts to school boards.

This is a question of whether or not this government can be trusted. This government wants total control, and that's what Bill 160 is: total control to do whatever they want to do, whenever they want to do it. We have seen what they want to do, we've seen what they have done, and on neither count does this government deserve the trust of anybody who is concerned about public education.

This government should not be cutting off debate on this bill. This government should be withdrawing this bill. The fact that instead of that they are cutting off debate on the bill before they have even sat down with the teachers is clear evidence that this government wants a fight, that they are pushing teachers against the wall, that they are breaking the system so that ultimately they can destroy public education. I believe that every one of us who cares about the future of publicly funded education will do whatever we can to stop this government.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Let me begin by congratulating my colleague, my critic for education, for the outstanding work she has been doing on this particular matter and for her ability to articulate the concerns not only of teachers but also of parents and students and all those who consider themselves friends of public education in Ontario.

At the outset I want to remind people what we're talking about here in Ontario. We're talking about the most radical change to the way in which we deliver public education ever imposed upon the province. We should keep in mind that when we talk about education, we are talking fundamentally about the means by which we can assure ourselves of future success. That's what this is all about. So when we proceed down this path, I suggest that we ought to do so gingerly and delicately, with an

understanding that if we screw this up today, we pay for it in spades tomorrow.

The second thing I want to talk about is my capacity in addressing this issue. First of all and perhaps foremost, I am the father of four students. I have a daughter in grade 11, I have a son in grade 9, I have another son in grade 8 and another son in grade 6. As a father, it is vitally important to me that they do well in school and that their teachers do their very best for them so that my children can find success later on in life and hopefully, if they choose to do so, they will stay here in Ontario and find opportunity here.

I can also tell you that I am the son of a trustee. My dad was a trustee with the Ottawa school board for some 16 years, and I can tell you that in that capacity my father would receive telephone calls on a regular basis from parents who were concerned about what was going on in school. Unlike the image the government would put forth, there are many, many good people who give of their time. They are volunteers, by and large, with a little bit of pay, who act as trustees and represent local concerns on their local school board. They work very hard, and in many ways they are the unsung heroes in the delivery of education in Ontario.

I want to speak as well in my capacity as the husband of a teacher, someone who has been teaching for a long time in the public system of education here in Ontario. I know it is high fashion in the eyes of the government to pound our teachers and to suggest that they are all underworked and overpaid, that they are somehow against bringing about any improvement in education, that they are defenders of the status quo, and that the very last thing they might have in their hearts is the interests of their students.

1640

I can also tell you that I happen to have a couple of sisters who are teachers and a brother-in-law who is a teacher, so I have a good understanding of some of the challenges, I think, that teachers have to contend with in their classrooms in 1997. I think teaching has become more complex. The demands that we place on our teachers have grown much more significant over the years.

Is there room for improvement in education? Absolutely. Are all teachers undoubtedly good teachers? No. I don't even think teachers would tell you that. But if we are going to bring about genuine change in the classroom, I think it's important for the Minister of Education at some point along the way to stand up and say: "I value teaching. I value teachers and I understand some of the challenges they've got to contend with in their classrooms."

We have not had that information. We have not had that message sent by either the Premier or the Minister of Education since this government took power in Ontario. Teachers have always been viewed as some kind of an obstacle to be overcome, rather than a resource to be tapped.

I also want to speak of course as leader of my party, the Ontario Liberal Party, the official opposition, and I want to tell you that I have some very grave concerns about Bill 160 and what it's about to do to public education in Ontario. In particular, I can tell you that when I compare what I think I would be doing as Premier of the province. It's important for me to tell people how I think the Premier has behaved irresponsibly on this file. I think what he ought to be doing is making every genuine effort to avert a strike. That's his responsibility as leader in the province. As the foremost leader, as Premier, he's got to manage public affairs. The last thing he ought to be doing is participating in any effort on the part of the Minister of Education to construct a crisis here, to bring this thing to a head so that we cannot help but have 126,000 teachers go on strike. That would be unprecedented in the history of this province.

It's rather perverse that it has taken this government to bring together teachers right across the province, together with trustees, together with students, who have all said: "Hang on a sec. We have some genuine concerns about what this government is doing and we are afraid you're going to cause some irreparable harm to public education in Ontario." It has taken a very special kind of government to bring all of those people together.

What are we talking about here? At the end of the day, what we're talking about is a government that is bent, and I use that word advisedly, on removing another $1 billion from public education in Ontario. To date they've already taken out $533 million. I know the members opposite have heard me say this time and time again, but it's worth repeating.

They are causing serious damage to the delivery of junior kindergarten in Ontario. Over two dozen boards to date have stopped providing junior kindergarten because of the lack of funding on the part of this government. Everybody who has ever given any serious thought to this and has done any reading and listened to the experts and talked to teachers knows that the single biggest indicator of academic success is how ready kids are to learn when they get into kindergarten. Junior kindergarten is an important element in making sure our kids are ready to learn when they get to kindergarten. Everybody understands that in this knowledge-based, global economy we need more education, not less education. We have to fund junior kindergarten, and in fact that is one of the very few commitments I have made to date: If we enjoy the privilege of forming the next government, I will fund junior kindergarten throughout the province.

The other thing that we are doing as a result of this $533 million in cuts so far is that we have made school boards make serious cuts to their special education programs. It seems to me that quite apart from the funding issue there's a question here of right and wrong. What about helping out those students who have special learning problems? Do we not owe them some kind of special duty? Do we not have some kind of special responsibility that our children who have learning difficulties have those special needs met through our education program? Under this government — it's important for our public to understand this — we have been making cuts to special education in Ontario.

The other thing we ought to understand is that adult education is under attack as well. Members opposite surely understand the difficulty you're going to have getting a job in Ontario if all you have is your grade 10 or your grade 11, yet at the same time this government is making cuts to adult education. So now, as I understand it, outside Toronto 80% of adult education is under attack or has been eliminated. Outside Toronto, if you've only got your grade 10 or your grade 11, you have serious difficulty now in Ontario in obtaining a high school diploma.

What the government is about is they want to remove $1 billion from education. They have taken out half a billion; they believe they can find another $1 billion. Why do they need that $1 billion? This is not an overly complicated matter. The government promised a $5.5-billion tax cut. Our mothers have all told us, and so have our fathers, there is no free lunch. They've got to get that money somewhere, and they have no reservations whatsoever about removing it from our public system of education. That's what this is all about. It's not an effort to bring about an improvement in education in Ontario; it's an effort to find money to deliver on a foolish, ill-considered, irresponsible promise to deliver us all a tax cut.

Today I once again asked the Minister of Education if he would not ratchet this thing down a little bit, pull it away from the fire, cool things off by just standing up in the House and promising that this is really not about money, that he really is genuinely concerned about bringing about improvement in the way in which we deliver public education in Ontario. He could do that quite simply by saying, "I'm not taking any more money out of education because I feel that public education is at risk in Ontario and we owe it above all, first and foremost, to our students to maintain the number of teachers that are there and the amount of funding that is necessary."

I am not going to apologize for the fact that education is expensive. That's something that is important to me and my party. We owe it to the next generation. Furthermore, if we want to look at it the other way, we owe it to ourselves to make sure they get the very best. Some of that happens to cost money, and I am not about to apologize for that. Good teaching costs good money; there's no two ways about it. We shouldn't apologize for that.

I also gave the minister the opportunitiy today to pull us back from the edge by promising that, contrary to what he said in the past, he is not about to remove 10,000 teachers from our system of public education, that he's not even about to remove some 4,400 teachers from education in Ontario, that what it's really all about is improving education, and so for that reason he's not going to use this bill to remove teachers from the system.

Again, he rejected that opportunitiy. All he had to do was stand up and say: "I'm with you on this. It's not an exercise to gut the system of teachers." He didn't say that. He once again refused to make the kind of promise that is so necessary to pull us back from the brink.

Remember what we're talking about here: 126,000 teachers going out all at once; 2.1 million students being put out of their schools; parents having to make alternative arrangements, presuming that they can, having to take days off work, having to find babysitters. You might be able to find a few babysitters, but when 2.1 million students go out at once, how are they possibly going to be able to cope with that? Those parents and those students are relying entirely on the Premier to avert this disaster, to make sure it doesn't happen.

Let's understand that the responsibility for managing public affairs, the responsibility for averting the strike, doesn't lie with anybody other than our elected representatives, and especially with the government. It lies entirely in the hands of the government. If we have a strike, it will be the fault of the government because the government could have averted this. It's as simple as that.

Some people who watch this on TV and who hear the government spin and hear me speak and hear members of the third party speak, and it's understandable, can become confused. Sometimes it's difficult to tell what the truth is in all of this. I have some simple advice for them: trust your instincts. Visit their local school, go in there and count the number of students that are in the classrooms, ask the teachers about the number of textbooks. They might find out as well along the way while they're in there: Ask teachers how much work they are doing for which they are not being paid.

Let's set aside the government's spin for a moment — trust your oun instincts.That's vitally important, and I would ask our public not to lose sight of their own ability, not to refrain from using their own good judgement when it comes to this very important issue.

1650

This is a power grab on the part of the government. This is a power grab when it comes to public education in Ontario. I wouldn't have said this a while back, but now I'm absolutely convinced of this. Nothing less than the very future of public education is at risk here. We're talking about a government that's making efforts, in a kind of insidious way, to undermine public education, to devalue public education, to devalue teaching and teachers.

I can tell you, as a parent myself, that you want the best for your kids because you know it's a competitive world out there. Parents are going to be saying, "Listen, if I can't get it from public education, if I can afford it, I'll go elsewhere." The next thing you know you're into some kind of a death spiral, where people are pulling out because the government's not devoting the necessary resources and is not sending the message to teachers, "We value your work." You get people pulling out and going elsewhere into a system that only our wealthy could afford, and that's a dangerous thing and I'll have no part of that. I am proud of our system of public education in Ontario.

Sure, we've got a few problems and nobody makes the argument that it's not beyond improvement, but I think we ought to be careful as we proceed down that path and we have to ensure that we capitalize on the front-line resources.

One of the single greatest assets we have in public education in Ontario is the goodwill of our teachers. If we don't have the goodwill of our teachers, we are in serious difficulty when it comes to delivering education. We need them. Sometimes you get the impression from the government that they believe education would be great in Ontario if you could just get rid of the teachers. The next you know the minister will be delivering courses on TV by himself, telling us what we should and shouldn't know, and that is a frightening prospect.

The minister can pull us back from the brink. It's not too late. I remain optimistic on this front because I have to. That's a duty my office imposes upon me. That's a duty parents and students right across the province impose upon me. They want me to do what I can to convince the Premier and the Minister of Education that they have the responsibility to avert a strike in this, and there are three simple things they can do.

First, they can say, "We promise we're not about to remove one further penny from public education."

Second, they can say, "We promise we're not about to remove teachers from our classrooms." Class sizes are already too big. I simply don't understand. We had math, we had the new math and now we've got John Snobelen's math. Under John Snobelen's math, apparently if you remove 5,000 teachers from the classroom, class sizes somehow go down. That's something I just haven't cottoned on to. Class sizes are going up. Let's not kid ourselves. That's what's going to happen under Bill 160. Class sizes are going to go up because we're going to have fewer teachers.

The third thing I ask the government to do, if it can't make any concessions on those first two points, is why the rush on this? Why do we have to go to the brink? This has become the overwhelming characteristic of this government. I think people are tired of this. Why do we have to be so confrontational, so divisive? Why do we have to set people apart or against each other, whether it's in health care or social services, and now in education? Isn't it the responsibility of the government to say, "I know the way and we can all go there together"? Isn't that the responsibility of government? It seems to me that's the responsibility of government.

What the government can and should do on that front is it ought to withdraw this bill. Rather than me standing up here and having to face a government that's telling us, "We're about to limit debate on this bill; we've heard enough from you people on this stuff; you're in the way of our agenda, so we want to shut you down," rather than me having to stand up and defend our right to continue to debate this very important bill, I should be saying to the government that I want to congratulate you for withdrawing this bill, for pulling it back, for pulling us back from the brink, so that the parents across Ontario will say, "Thank God we've got a government that understands our predicament and the challenges we face in our homes."

It's hard enough to get up in the morning and get the routine going and get the kids off to school. Seventy per cent of our kids are in homes where the parents are both working. They get out. They work during the course of the day. They come back. They lead a very hectic life. They've got a hectic pace back home. You get the dinner on the table. You help the kids with the homework. You're off to soccer or baseball or hockey or whatever else.

They don't need this government to throw one huge wrench into the works and say, "By the way, your schools are going to be closed and we're not sure how long they're going to be closed for, and by the way we're taking $1 billion out of the system anyway, and by the way, your kids' class sizes are going up because we're taking at least 4,400 teachers out of our schools." They don't need a government to do that. They need a government that says: "We value education in Ontario. We value public education. We are the government that at some point along the way is going to champion some of the things that are good in Ontario."

One of the things of which I am most proud is our system of public education. Again I'm not saying there's not room for improvement. But if we're going to improve it we've got to do it together, and you can't do it without the goodwill and without capitalizing on the expertise of our teachers, who are not, if members took the time to meet with them and to understand, defenders of the status quo. They are for change too, but it's for a much better kind of change, one that will ensure our students get the best possible education in Ontario.

Once again, if the government really has it in its heart to avert a strike, it will make three simple concessions. First, it will promise it's not going to take another cent out of education in Ontario; second, it will promise it's not going to lay off any teachers through its bill; third, and perhaps most important, right now it will take this bill off the burner, it will put it on ice, allow things to cool down and ensure it does everything possible to avert a strike in Ontario.

Mr Mike Colle (Oakwood): I rise to speak to this motion for closure. As you know, this government has established a pattern whereby every time a bill comes up, rather than debate it they want to impose closure. They want to cut off debate because the pattern they're establishing is one of basically stifling opposition and ensuring the public doesn't get an opportunity to find out what's in this legislation. Here's a government that does this. Every week now there's a closure motion, unprecedented, closure motion after closure motion.

Here we have one of the most fundamental parts of this province — education. What are they going to do? Rather than allowing more debate, more discussion, giving the public more time to find out what's in this bill, they're going to evoke closure, cutting off debate. Do you know why they want to cut off debate? Because they know what they're doing is something that doesn't have the best of motives. Their motives are basically entrenched in ideology. That's the neoconservative ideology which basically demeans public education, that says public education is falling apart, that public education is something that should be basically dismantled and replaced with something else.

As you know, one of the tragic things is that as we move towards this neoconservative concept of education, we are going to possibly follow the American trap, where in the United States only 40% of the students attend public schools, 40% of the students attend public education. In Canada, in Ontario, 90% of our students go to public school and that's a record to be proud of.

Sure, our public schools are not perfect. They need all kinds of reform and they need all kinds of help, but they should not be dismantled and they should not be bulldozed by a government that is basically intent on one thing. They're intent on extracting money out of education to pay for the tax cut. That's the motive here. That's why they don't want debate on this bill. They don't want the public to find out that's what they're doing. That's why they're in such a mad, reckless hurry and that's why they're putting children at risk here. They're putting the children in high schools and elementary schools across this province at risk by this reckless attempt to reconfigure education to the likeness of John Snobelen or Mike Harris.

John Snobelen and Mike Harris aren't the ones who have all the answers. The answers are to be found in the parents, in the teachers, in the volunteers and the experts who are interested in education. They are saying: "Slow down. You are endangering a very precious commodity, and that is our children."

1700

Our children are now being placed at risk as this government marches on to some agenda that is essentially bent on reconfiguring, remaking education — to what likeness we don't know yet, because they won't even divulge the funding formula. They won't give it to us, because if they do that, then we'll find out what the true agenda is. That's why this government wants to invoke closure, because they don't want people to know what they're up to, because what they're up to is basically dismantling a system that should be invested in and not dismantled.

If you look at what's happening in our local schools, sure, we've got some schools that are in need. I live in an area of central Metropolitan Toronto that has a lot of schools that deal with a variety of children from all over the world, and they are children who need attention. You need money and good teachers to give those children attention.

The schools are not perfect, but I'll tell you, we've got more good things happening in our schools than bad things. We've got many more good teachers than bad teachers. We've got teachers who don't just spend time in the classroom. The classroom is not the end-all and be-all, because teachers also spend time before school, after school, with drama, with music, helping kids with their math, doing athletic programs, outside that box called the classroom.

This minister and this government are fixed on that box and saying, "If it doesn't occur in that box, it doesn't count." I'll tell you, it counts when you teach a kid how to throw a baseball; it counts when you teach a child how to read Shakespearean verse. Those things count too. It counts when you hold a kid's hand and speak to him for a few minutes after school. Those things don't occur in that box, but they count.

This minister is saying, "If it doesn't occur in the box, we're not paying for it." That is a minister who doesn't understand that you can't just teach in the box; you have to realize that there are human dimensions in a school, because a school is more than a building; it's a community that's vibrant, dynamic and living. Our schools have been trying to deal with that vibrancy, and they've been dealing with it as best they can, but all of a sudden now — if you're going to take $1 billion out of our schools, how are you ever going to overcome the challenges? You're just going to make it even more impossible to deal with the challenges that our families, our parents, our students and our teachers face.

Teacher-bashing doesn't do any good. Day after day, this minister, since he became minister, has been demeaning teachers, saying they were underworked, overpaid, that they had no right to be running the system — he was going to run the system. That is a difficult position to take if you're trying to rebuild something, when the main builders of it, the teachers, are said to be irrelevant. How do you build it without teachers? How do you build it without parents? The parents and teachers are there daily. They're in the front lines, not the Minister of Education.

You're not going to have a vibrant education system if it's run centralized from Queen's Park, a centralized system of this magnitude. In Metropolitan Toronto, we're going to have a mega-board of 300,000 students. How can you micromanage that from Queen's Park? That's in Metro alone, but they're going to micromanage education all over the province. You can't do it right. Do you know why? You're not dealing with automobile parts, you're not dealing with shoes, you're not dealing with buildings; you're dealing with human beings, fragile human beings who are in their formative years.

You can't centralize and impersonalize that. You can't do it with bureaucrats at Queen's Park who are going to do everything from setting a tax rate to telling kids how many hours there are going to be in a course. You can't micromanage this precious commodity called children from Queen's Park. It won't work. It's a hare-brained attempt to do something that won't work.

That is what this bill is going to do. That's why this government is trying to invoke closure, because they don't want the public to find out that this is a hare-brained scheme that is going to destroy not only a system, it's going to destroy and jeopardize children who need investment in education rather than dismantling, which this government is set upon.

I speak from experience. I taught on the front lines in Metropolitan Toronto for 18 years and I was proud to give 18 years of my life to education. I want to talk about some of the people I saw in schools. They were there from 7:30 in the morning, most of them, until 6 o'clock at night. They were there on Saturdays and Sundays. They were there when the kids needed them.

I talk about Father John Redmond, one of the best teachers I ever saw, who worked seven days a week teaching. Father John Redmond — they named Father John Redmond school in Etobicoke after him — set an example of giving to kids seven days a week. I remember Hugh McDougall, a vice-principal who worked around the clock with everything from athletics to organizing school trips to making sure kids got that helping hand. He did not just teach in the classroom and inspire kids there. He went out to the football fields, the hockey arenas, into the neighbourhoods where kids could get that kind of extra support that parents needed. These are people this government is demeaning and trying to put down and bash. There are thousands of Hugh McDougalls and Father John Redmonds out there who are willing to give to kids.

Why would this government now try and say that these people should have a say in education? These are the builders of our future generation. The teachers have to have support. You can't all of a sudden say, "We're going to replace these teachers with outside people now and they're going to do an even better job." What kind of a message does that send to a teacher, if they're being told they're going to be replaced by people outside education who don't have the credentials? What about parents? Do they want these outsiders in the classroom? Maybe they should be asked whether they want them to replace teachers. I think parents should have a say in that.

Certainly, if we go on in looking at what we need in education, we don't need teacher-bashing, we don't need centralized government control out of Queen's Park to tell people in Lucknow or Listowel or Lindsay or downtown Toronto how to run education. The big, fat bureaucrats in Queen's Park and their political masters should mind their own business and they should fund education properly and make sure there's a good system in place. But they should get their nose out of kids' classrooms. It doesn't work when you try and do things from a far, distant bureaucracy here in some bunker at Queen's Park.

Give education back to the parents, give it to the teachers and those parents and teachers will run the system much better than any bureaucrat from Queen's Park will. I have a lot more faith in those teachers and parents in the communities than the bureaucrats, who are faceless. Can you imagine trying to find out who's in charge of a school? Who do you go to? Who do you call if you've got a problem on a 30,000-student mega-board? Who do you call?

I had a young woman call me the other day who said she wanted to run for trustee here in Toronto. She said she phoned the Ministry of Education five times. Every time, she was given voice mail and the runaround. She asked for some kind of information on what instructions she would have to have in the new trusteeship on the mega-board. The Ministry of Education couldn't give her any information. She even wanted to help and she was given the runaround. People are going to be lost in these new mega-centralized boards across Ontario.

This bill does nothing but essentially take money out of education, get rid of teachers and centralize control. How is this going to be beneficial? What benefit is there in this bill? What is there in this bill that's going to help parents with their children? What is it going to do for the music programs? What is it going to do for basic mathematics? Will it have more time for teachers' help? That's the basics of education, not centralized control at Queen's Park with political masters in the ministry dictating to people all across Ontario.

That's what Bill 160 does: It goes against the trend of 50 years of giving local control of education, to centralized control. It has got to be sheer madness to have education run from Queen's Park alone, with everything set out of Queen's Park. Essentially, as the member for Scarborough-Agincourt was saying earlier today, you're going to have taxation without representation on schools. You're going to have taxation by regulation.

1710

Where are the parents going to have time or knowledge in terms of having time to contribute in education? This is taking it away from parents and giving it to political bureaucrats. That's what this Bill 160 is about. That's why the government wants to cut off debate, because they know that as more and more parents are finding out about this bill, they're becoming outraged. They are phoning members of Parliament across the province, disgusted with Bill 160, because this bill is a total fraud.

I know tonight here in Metropolitan Toronto there will be over 10,000 teachers meeting at Maple Leaf Gardens who will be protesting this bill. I speak to my fellow teachers to stand up against this bully government which tries to dictate education. I tell parents all across this province, put your stock in your schools and your teachers and your kids. Don't believe Bill 160 and the Mike Harris government. Their agenda is basically the extraction of $1 billion. Their agenda is essentially to centralize control at Queen's Park and not give you a say in education. That's why they want to cut off debate on Bill 160, because this government doesn't want you, parents, to know what's in this bill.

This bill takes away parents' control. It takes away teachers' control. All it gives is bureaucratic, centralized, dictatorial control over education in this province. It's the worst thing that could happen to education. That's why for the first time in decades, teachers across this province are coming together, standing up, because they know what's at stake. What's at stake is the future of public education, which means education for everybody who needs it and wants it, that is available to everyone. If you take that away, if we go the American style of private education for only the well-to-do, we are destroying something Ontario has developed a world reputation for.

I ask the parents and teachers, stand strong against Bill 160. Stand strong for your kids.

Mr Wildman: I regret very much that we are debating this motion here today. I want to remind members on all sides of the House that we are debating a time allocation motion on Bill 160.

When I first saw this motion tabled last Thursday, I must say that initially I was confused, because last week it appeared that the Premier and the Minister of Education and Training were making some overtures to the members of the teaching profession to indicate that there might be some room for discussion, there might be some room for compromise by the government. The Premier started saying things that we haven't heard since this government came into office. The minister started praising teachers, trying to paint himself as a friend of teachers.

So we have to understand what is going on. I thought then: "Well, they're introducing a time allocation motion. Perhaps the government is tabling it simply to have it there in case they want it, in case they feel they need it." But today, here we are.

Although many members in their interventions in this debate so far have just talked about Bill 160, which they could have indeed done if we were continuing debate on second reading, we are debating a time allocation motion which will cut off debate on Bill 160.

This evening there are rallies all over the province. In particular, there's going to be a very large rally — no one knows exactly how many people will be there, but there are predictions that it could be as many as 20,000 — at Maple Leaf Gardens here in Toronto. But there are also rallies in other places across the province this evening: in Mississauga, Iroquois Falls, Gogama and Espanola, and tomorrow in small communities like Dubreuilville and Wawa in my constituency, and in larger cities like Hamilton. Wednesday it's in Belleville, Hornepayne, Victoria-Haliburton, Lindsay and Fenelon Falls. There are rallies all this week in which not the union bosses, as this government is wont to say, but grass-roots members of the teachers' unions, the teachers' federations, are gathering together to express their concerns about Bill 160 and to say they want it stopped.

We have these rallies organized. At the same time, we have the minister, in line with what he was saying last week, who has agreed to meet with the leadership of the unions, what the members of the Conservative Party in this House continue to call "the union bosses," this week on Wednesday.

Initially when I heard the minister say he was ready to meet, it sounded to me like he was trying to cool the situation, back off a bit, get a dialogue going and perhaps avoid a confrontation.As I said, I was initially confused when I saw this motion. After all, we are facing potentially the most serious confrontation in public education that this province has ever seen. We are facing a situation where in fact the education of students in all of the systems of education, in all of the schools of this province, will be disrupted because of a dispute between the teachers and the government.

I thought, when I heard the minister say he was willing to talk to the teachers, that he really wanted to avoid that confrontation and see if there was some way he could back off from the position he had taken with some grace and in some way resolve the concerns of the teachers, who are concerned about the quality of education for their students.

So how does one explain the introduction of this motion for debate today to cut off debate on Bill 160? If the government is serious about wanting to avoid a disruption of the education of students in Ontario, why are they introducing this motion before the minister meets with the leadership of the unions? It sounds to me like the minister and the government are prejudging the results of that meeting. Perhaps it's even worse than that. Perhaps they just decided they are going to meet with the teachers but they don't intend to say anything of importance, they don't intend to put anything forward that might avoid a confrontation, that in fact they are going to force a confrontation.

I see the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is listening to the debate, so I'll use an agricultural term. Frankly, this is like waving a red flag in front of a bull. How on earth does this cool things out, by introducing a time allocation motion that cuts off debate on the very day that the teachers are holding their largest meeting and two days prior to the teachers' leadership meeting with the minister? How does that cool things out? How does that avoid a confrontation? It will have the exact opposite effect.

All I can conclude is that this government wants a strike. If they didn't want a strike, why are they doing this? I don't understand it.

Mr Froese: We've been talking about it for years.

Mr Wildman: I'm not talking about Bill 160 here; I'm talking about what we are debating, the motion. Why are we cutting off debate on Bill 160? Why are we not just having a second reading debate here today on Bill 160?

1720

We're saying to the teachers: "On the one hand the minister wants to meet with the leadership, but on the other hand we're going to force Bill 160 through as is, the way it's written, the current draft." It's going to pass second reading. It will be accepted in principle even though we know that the teachers are opposed to the principles in this bill. There is no question about that. The teachers' unions do not support the principle of Bill 160. They want to meet with the minister to see if there is some way there can be changes.

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): Teachers' unions. What about teachers?

Mr Wildman: I think there were 6,000 teachers in Ottawa. There were over 1,000 teachers in Sault Ste Marie.

Mrs McLeod: There were 3,200 in Thunder Bay.

Mr Wildman: There were 3,200 teachers in Thunder Bay. My God, if these are just the leaders of the unions, they must be awfully big unions.

Hon Mr Harnick: You said it.

Mr Wildman: We'll see. We'll see how many grass-roots members of the teachers' federations attend the meetings this week.

I guess the Attorney General needs to be convinced. I guess he takes that view that somehow the leaders of the

unions are not representative of the teachers who elect them, who choose them to be their leaders. If they are successful — I don't know whether they will be or not — in filling Maple Leaf Gardens this evening, will the minister still be sitting in his place saying it's just the unions, just the leaders of the unions, or will he be saying the members of the unions, the people who pay the dues and who choose the leaders, are opposed to what this government is doing? If they aren't, why would they go to the meeting?

I thought the government was trying to win some time, and then they bring in a time allocation motion that cuts off debate. It's contradictory, and the only explanation I can think of — if there is some other explanation, I would like to have it explained — is that they are trying to force a confrontation. I do not want a strike that disrupts the education of students in this province. I do not want to have the schools in Ontario close because of a dispute between the teachers and the government over a piece of legislation that is going to hurt the quality of education for students in this province. I don't want that to happen. I thought the government had decided they didn't want it to happen, but by moving this, this is a provocation. This motion being brought today for debate in the House is intended to provoke something, and I fear that it may in fact provoke a strike.

Why would the government want to be provocative? Why would the government move this motion today? Why wouldn't the government simply continue debate at second reading? The only explanation must be that they want the confrontation. There can't be any other explanation. What does this meeting on Wednesday mean, if anything, if the government has decided to pass the bill now and have a vote on it now, before the meeting?

In a way the government is acting like the schoolyard bully. As a child, when I attended school, or later when I was involved in the teaching profession, or just my experience with kids in hockey when I was involved in minor hockey, my experience was that when you ran into a bully, the only way you could deal with a bully was to stand up to that bully, because as long as the bully thought he could terrorize, as long as the bully believed he could scare and intimidate, the bully would continue to bully.

Ironically, sometimes, particularly in hockey, as I recall, it was the smallest kid on the ice who stood up to the bully and said, "No, I'm not going to take this." In many cases they beat the bully in hockey skills and made them look foolish, but in other cases, they actually had to stand up and challenge the person who was trying to bully them. What happens in almost every case in that kind of situation, whether it's in the school yard, on the hockey rink, in the classroom, in the home, anywhere, is that the bully backs off immediately, because essentially bullies are cowards. They try to pick on people who they see as vulnerable or who will not have the support of others.

But when other people — perhaps they themselves are not prepared or able or don't have the courage individually to stand up to the bully — see an individual who is prepared to do that, they rally round, because nobody likes a bully. The bully, as long as he's able to intimidate, may have a following, but as soon as he turns tail and runs from somebody who has the courage to take him on, that following usually dissipates very quickly.

That's what this government risks in bullying. They run the risk of alienating a very large segment of the population when they do this to teachers and to the quality of education in the province. Parents are concerned, as teachers are, about the quality of education that their children receive. They do not buy the illogical position that this government puts forward that the way to improve the quality of education in this province is to attack teachers, the very people who are the most important in implementing changes in education, by hurting their morale, by laying them off or getting rid of a large number of them, whether it's 4,000, 5,000, 6,000 or 10,000. None of that improves the quality of education, particularly when the government is obviously determined to take money out of the system.

The government has already taken $800 million and that has hurt programs, it's hurt the quality of education for students. We've seen programs cut, we've seen physical education, we've seen library, music, special ed, art programs all cut back. We've seen junior kindergarten adversely affected, we've seen adult education go the way of the dodo bird in some places, because of cuts that this government has imposed in education despite its commitments in the last election campaign — $800 million.

I enter this debate as a former teacher, as someone who is married to a teacher, who has a brother and sister who are teachers, who's had three children go through the system and has another little girl who wants to start and hopes that junior kindergarten will be in place next year so that she will be able to go to school, because she's ready. She's starting to read already.

Someone over there, when there was an intervention before, referred to junior kindergarten as babysitting. They don't know anything about it if that's what they think it is. Early childhood education is the grounding that children, individuals, need that affects their whole educational career. The better that grounding, the better they will achieve in school and in life. There are lots of studies that show that, and even Mr Snobelen, the Minister of Education and Training, admits that. So it's interesting that some of his backbenchers still consider it babysitting.

Mr Froese: Who said that?

Mr Wildman: I think it was Mr Pettit. What riding is he from in Hamilton? He's the one who said it.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): Hamilton Mountain.

Mr Wildman: Hamilton Mountain. If you want to know who said it, it was he.

1730

The government has already taken $800 million out of education, which has adversely affected classroom education in the province, the quality of education for our students, and the government has talked about taking another $1 billion out. This is where it gets kind of

confusing, because last week the Premier first, then the minister and then other members of the Conservative Party said, "No, no, we never said we were going to take $1 billion out." We know the tape. I've seen the tape where the minister actually said it, but the fact that they said, "No, no, we didn't say that," indicated to me that maybe they were going to back off.

In the House, in the Legislature here, we have asked the government to make a commitment. We have asked the government to say that whatever savings they achieve through restructuring of the education system will be reinvested in education, that not one more cent will be taken out of the public education system for our students in Ontario, and repeatedly the Premier and the minister have refused to give that commitment. Why? Obviously it's because they do intend to take money out. If they didn't intend to take the money out, they would get up and say, "We make that commitment." It may not be $1 billion. Maybe it's going to be another $800 million or $500 million or $600 million. They said they weren't going to take anything out this year. They said it was going to be frozen this year and they've already taken $500 million out.

This is not about teachers and education workers; this is about students. This is about the quality of their education in this province. The Minister of Education stated at the beginning that he wanted to significantly change education in the province and to do that one of the ways was to invent a crisis. Well, here we are in October 1997 and he's achieved it. We are facing a situation where every school in the province may be shut down, and if not every one, then the vast majority of them perhaps. All of those kids who should be in those classrooms, should be in those gymnasia, should be on those sports fields, should be learning, will have their education disrupted.

How did we get to this point? We got to it because the minister first cut the education budget by $800 million and cut programs, hurting students. Teachers care about their students. Teachers are upset about that. They're concerned about the effect on the education of their students.

He also then went around bad-mouthing teachers everywhere he went. He said they were self-interested. He said they were overpaid and underworked. He called them a special-interest group. He even intimated that they don't care about students and their learning environment. He indicated that they were only interested in themselves and their own paycheques. Obviously everyone, no matter where they work, is interested in maintaining a job and maintaining their paycheque. That's how we provide for our families, so that's obvious. But to suggest that teachers don't care about students and their learning environment indicates the minister doesn't understand how things work in education.

By alienating teachers and hurting their morale, he cannot improve education for students. Central to the improvement of education is the commitment of dedicated, knowledgeable, enthusiastic teachers. If teachers suffer from bad morale and are alienated from the proposed changes, those changes are doomed to fail, no matter how good they might be.

Also, by making these kinds of comments, the minister betrays a complete lack of understanding of the motivation of most people who become teachers. Why does he think people become teachers? It is not an easy job. I know there are some in this government caucus who think it is an easy job. They look at the number of holidays that teachers have and they look at the number of hours they are actually in the classroom and they say, "Look, these people don't have to work very hard." But how many of us in 1997 could spend the hours that teachers spend with 25 or 30 elementary students, or 35 or 40 teenagers?

I'll be quite blunt. I come from the teaching profession, but as a parent when my own kids were in their adolescence, I was glad that somebody else was teaching them, bluntly, because adolescents, because of all of the things that are going on in their lives, can sometimes be rather difficult people.

So why do people become teachers? They become teachers first and foremost because they like kids, because they care about kids, because they care about students. They also become teachers because they care about their subject matter, in many cases. They care about their program. They think it's important to pass this along to the next generation. They become teachers because they care about learning. They become teachers because they care about students achieving to their greatest potential.

Any of us who have had the opportunity to be in teaching know the rush that a teacher has when a kid does something beyond what we anticipated they were capable of doing. That's why people become teachers: because they want kids to achieve and they want to be able to say that they helped those kids achieve. They want those children and students to be able to develop to their potential so that they can provide for themselves and contribute to society when they graduate. That's why people become teachers, not because they want holidays, they think it's an easy job or they want a big paycheque. The people who enter teaching with those reasons don't last in it very long. They're out of it very, very quickly.

But we've had a minister for the last two years who's been going around the province bashing teachers. Then somehow he expects them to be able to deliver on the reforms he wants to bring in. Teachers, it may surprise some of the government members — perhaps the Attorney General will be surprised when he finds out that grassroots members of the teachers' federations, not just the leadership, don't like this government and they don't like the minister and they don't like the program and they're completely opposed to taking $1 billion out of education. They're opposed to the changes and the amount of money that's already been taken out of the education because they know it has hurt the quality of education for students.

Now teachers obviously understand, if they're good teachers, and most of them are, that education must continually change and adapt if it's going to properaly serve the needs of students in a changing, and more rapidly changing, world. When teachers talk about their

working conditions, they're not just talking about conditions that affect them in their profession. They're also talking about the learning condition of students. Why is it teachers want to be able to negotiate on things like class size? Because they believe as professionals they have something important to say about what should be done in order to assist students to achieve to their greatest potential, and part of that is how much contact they have on a daily basis with the classroom teacher. That's profoundly affected by the size of the class.

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Some people would say: "Then why are the teachers opposed to Bill 160? At least in Bill 160 the government is saying that there will be a cap put on class sizes." Unfortunately, in the bill it doesn't say what cap or caps. What will be the size of classes in the primary grades? What will be the size of classes in the intermediate level? What will be the size of classes in the senior grades? We don't know that. That's all going to be set by regulation.

There is the reason that teachers are opposed, because this bill, Bill 160, that debate is being closed off on because of this motion, concentrates power to make those kinds of decisions in the hands of the minister and his bureaucrats. It takes the decision-making power away from the local community and concentrates it here at Queen's Park, while at the very same time Bill 160 will facilitate a system where the minister will take complete control over funding of education. The Treasurer will set the mill rate for taxes for education right across the province and the Minister of Education and Training will determine what the grants are for the school boards across the province.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Fort York): We'll all be equal then, Bud.

Mr Wildman: Yes, we'll be all equal. We'll be moving people downwards. We'll be equalizing at the bottom. So the effect will be this: There will be no local accountability. School boards will have no say and, as a result of that, the parents will have almost no say because they won't be able to influence the bureaucrats here at Queen's Park. At least when there's a trustee who has to be elected, the trustee has to attempt to be accountable to the ratepayers. Now those ratepayers will not have any access to the person or persons who are actually setting the mill rate. That's going to be done here at Queen's Park.

The teachers' federations oppose Bill 160 for the same reasons that trustees and school boards oppose it. It's a power grab. It's a grab of power, a centralizing of power by the minister and by the Conservative government here at Queen's Park. It's about assuring that the provincial Conservative government will be able to control all aspects of financing of education in the province.

Why does the government want to control all aspects of the financing of education? They say it's because they want equity, as my friend from Fort York indicated. They say they wanted equity, but it's not about that. What's it about is the ability then for the government to ensure that when the government cuts grants to education, there isn't a local authority that can raise property taxes and balance it off. It's about ensuring that less money will be spent on education in Ontario.

Now, we don't know what the number is. The government seems to be backing off $1 billion, so it could be $800 million, it could be whatever, but there's no other reason for the government to do what it's doing in terms of centralizing its control over education here at Queen's Park.

I regret very much that this government which purports to talk about accountability in this particular bill is diminishing accountability. It's diminishing local control. It means that people living in small communities in large school boards will not have much influence over those boards, and it means that the boards themselves will have almost no influence over decision-making in education. So the people who are elected to these boards by the ratepayers will not really have any say, and some faceless bureaucrat here at Queen's Park will prepare regulations that will be then passed behind closed doors by the cabinet, with no input and no say from the parents or the other taxpayers who pay for the education of our students.

Bill 160 is also about constricting the scope of collective bargaining. I have already talked about taking away the right to negotiate on class size. It also takes away the right to negotiate things like preparation time, and this is perhaps the thing that sticks in the craw of most professional teachers. The Education Improvement Commission recommended a 25% cut in preparation time, and this government in this bill is looking at a 50% cut for secondary school teachers, double what the commission recommended.

What does that say? It says that this government doesn't believe that teachers spend the time they have for preparation productively, because if they did spend it productively, the government wouldn't be wanting to cut it. I guess members of the government believe that teachers spend their preparation time in the staff room playing bridge or something. They don't understand what teachers use preparation time for. Sometimes yes, a teacher may in fact take half an hour off. If I had to face 35 young kids every day, I'd need a little bit of time off during education. Just ask the Speaker what it's like having to deal with us every day.

Interjection.

Mr Wildman: The fault is on both sides of the House.

By far, what teachers do most in their preparation time is prepare lessons to teach students, they mark assignments, they research for future classes or projects, they give remedial help to students who need it, either in small groups or individually, and they may spend time talking to parents of students who need help. They may spend time doing that as a group with other teachers or individually. They spend time arranging class trips or getting the equipment needed for the football season or the hockey season, or getting things ready for the school play. That's what they do in their preparation time, and by cutting it by 50%, this government is saying all of those things are not useful, they are not part of educating

students, they are not part of the quality of education for Ontario kids.

This government wonders why teachers are upset and angry? The problem, at least in the short run, is if the government moves forward on Bill 160, many of the dedicated teachers who are giving their time to do extracurricular activities are going to stop. They're very angry.

I suppose this government says: "In 160 that's not a problem, because in this bill, we're going to be able to bring in people who aren't teachers to do those things. If the phys ed teacher or the math teacher isn't coaching the football club, we can bring in one of the local sports heroes who may want to volunteer and give his time. If the English teacher isn't prepared to help the drama club with the school play, there may be volunteers from the community who have expertise in that area who will come in and do it." But that misses a very important point. All of those volunteers are already doing that, and they work with the teacher, who has the expertise and the professional knowledge about how to transmit knowledge to young people. They don't have that kind of training.

I once met with somebody who was one of my idols as a child. Because I was involved in minor hockey, I met Gordie Howe once, and it was a tremendous thrill for me to meet Gordie Howe. I started talking to Gordie Howe. I said, "Gordie, how come you have never coached?" He said, "Because I would be a terrible coach." That's what he said. I said, "Why would you be a terrible coach?" He said, "Because everything I do I just do; I don't know how or why." Frankly, he is so talented, it's second nature to him; he didn't have to learn most of it. That's why.

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That's why a mathematics genius obviously is a very poor math teacher: because a mathematics genius who can skip about five steps in solving an equation doesn't know how to deal with the individual who doesn't understand all those steps. That's what teaching is about. Teaching is about knowing pedagogy, knowing how to deal with students who don't understand as easily or how to deal with those other students who are so good that they want to move forward more quickly in a particular area.

So we bring in all of these volunteers. I think that is tremendous for the school community, but don't leave them on their own without a teacher who knows teaching and knows students as well. I say that as an individual who was involved in minor hockey that was not part of the school system. I've seen some very, very good coaches in that area and I've seen some disasters.

If we're going to bring people in to help in the school community, whether it's during the school day or in extracurricular activities, do not use them to supplant teachers. Do not say, as the minister has said, that we can use library technicians instead of teacher-librarians. Do not say, as the minister has said, "We will use social workers only, not in conjunction with teachers who understand the curriculum, to advise students." Do not say, as the minister has said, "We'll bring in early childhood educators to teach at the primary level," keeping in mind that they, according to their diplomas, can teach up to age 10.

Interjection.

Mr Wildman: If the government member is saying that the government does not intend to lay off teachers or have early retirements and replace them with these other kinds of people but just simply to assist them, then say it clearly and have the minister say it, because he hasn't said it.

Teachers are very worried about this because teachers see Bill 160 as being about laying off teachers or lowering the number of teachers who are working in the profession when they already see that class sizes are too large in many, many areas. You can't decrease class sizes, as is proposed in Bill 160, and at the same time decrease the number of teachers in the system. The math doesn't work, unless you're intending to put some of these other people into certain classes instead of teachers.

This is indeed a power grab by the government. It's a money grab from our kids. I've heard the minister on many occasions and other members of the Conservative Party say when they get stuck and they come back to the basic mantra, "Well, the previous governments, the Liberal government and the NDP government, have saddled these children with an enormous debt and we've got to cut that debt." What they're saying when they say that is that these kids who are in school today are going to pay, now, by losing programs and hurting the quality of education.

It's not just to lower the debt, even though the minister would like us to believe that, because we know what the government intends to do as well as lower the deficit: The government intends to give an income tax cut; 10% of the highest-income earners in the province will get two thirds of that cut, people who do not need an income tax cut and, ironically, people who probably can afford, many of them, to send their kids to private schools.

So the kids in the public system, the kids who wanted to go to junior kindergarten, the kids who wanted to have music and art, the kids who wanted technical programs, the kids who need special education programs are paying for the tax cut if this government does what it has said it was going to do.

All they have to do to get rid of all these fears is commit here and now that every cent they save will be reinvested in education, that they will not take one more cent out of public education. Just make that commitment. That would diffuse the confrontation right there. But we've given the government every opportunity to say that and the government has refused to make that commitment. What does that tell teachers? What does that tell parents? What does that tell students? What does that tell anyone who cares about public education? It tells them that this government intends to take more money out of education.

Nobody on this side of the House wants a strike. Very few teachers, if any, want to have a strike. Parents don't want to have a strike. Students don't want to have a strike. None of us want to see the disruption of the education of students in Ontario. But by presenting this motion here

today, I'm afraid I'm coming to the conclusion that the government wants a strike.

If the government were serious about trying to find a way out of this confrontation, they would not be closing off debate and saying, "We're going to pass Bill 160 at second reading without any further debate," before the government minister has even had the opportunity to meet with the leaders of the teachers' federation. On the very day that the teachers are planning the largest rally in the province at Maple Leaf Gardens, this is a provocation; that's all it is. The government is saying: "You can rally all you like against Bill 160. We're closing off debate and we're going to ram it through." How do you think the teachers are going to react to that? It's just plain stupid unless you actually want to have a strike.

Why couldn't the government have used its head? If it really wants to avoid a confrontation, back off on Bill 160 for at least a week. Why did they have to close off debate? Even if they didn't want to back off on it, why couldn't we just have been debating Bill 160 at second reading today? Why are we debating a time allocation motion which closes off debate and says that we must vote on the principle of Bill 160 here and now, even though they know that the majority of teachers, not just the union bosses that they talk about, are opposed to the principle of Bill 160.

Sure, they may be able to find anecdotally a few teachers who support it, but the vast majority of teachers, whether they're English elementary teachers, French elementary teachers, French secondary or English secondary, in the Catholic or secular systems, are opposed to the principle of Bill 160. None of them want a strike, but they also know from experience as individuals and as human beings and certainly as experienced teachers that someone has to stand up to the school yard bully. Someone has to defend the quality of education for Ontario students against the attacks of this government. Teachers know the effects on our kids' educational programs of the money that's been taken out so far and they fear sincerely the effects of the further cuts this government apparently is going to make.

It's important for students, for parents, for trustees, for education workers and for teachers, for the whole community, to say no to this government's attack on public education. It's important for all these people to stand up for the quality of education for our students in Ontario. This government must not move forward. This government must be prepared to back off and do what the religious leaders in Waterloo area said they should do today: "Back off, think again, talk to those involved, come to a conclusion that preserves the quality of education for our students and doesn't threaten them."

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Mr Johnson has moved government notice of motion number 50. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. It will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1800 to 1805.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Rollins, E.J. Douglas
Baird, John R.	Johns, Helen	Ross, Lillian
Bassett, Isabel	Johnson, Bert	Runciman, Robert W.
Beaubien, Marcel	Johnson, David	Sampson, Rob
Boushy, Dave	Jordan, W. Leo	Saunderson, William
Brown, Jim	Kells, Morley	Shea, Derwyn
Carroll, Jack	Klees, Frank	Sheehan, Frank
Clement, Tony	Martiniuk, Gerry	Skarica, Toni
Danford, Harry	Maves, Bart	Smith, Bruce
Doyle, Ed	McLean, Allan K.	Snobelen, John
Elliott, Brenda	Munro, Julia	Spina, Joseph
Eves, Ernie L.	Murdoch, Bill	Sterling, Norman W.
Fisher, Barbara	Mushinski, Marilyn	Stewart, R. Gary
Flaherty, Jim	Newman, Dan	Tsubouchi, David H.
Ford, Douglas B.	O'Toole, John	Turnbull, David
Fox, Gary	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Vankoughnet, Bill
Froese, Tom	Palladini, Al	Villeneuve, Noble
Galt, Doug	Parker, John L.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gilchrist, Steve	Pettit, Trevor	Wood, Bob
Harnick, Charles	Preston, Peter	Young, Terence H.
Hastings, John		

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Lessard, Wayne
Bisson, Gilles	Grandmaître, Bernard	Marchese, Rosario
Boyd, Marion	Gravelle, Michael	Martin, Tony
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	McLeod, Lyn
Churley, Marilyn	Kennedy, Gerard	Miclash, Frank
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Morin, Gilles E.
Conway, Sean G.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Pouliot, Gilles
Cordiano, Joseph	Lankin, Frances	Silipo, Tony
Crozier, Bruce	Laughren, Floyd	Wildman, Bud
Cullen, Alex		

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 61; the nays are 28.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It now being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1809.

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Mardi 7 octobre 1997

Speaker
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Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 7 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 7 octobre 1997

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MEALS ON WHEELS

Mr Mario Sergio (Yorkview): As we all know, October has been designated as Community Support Month by the Ontario Community Support Association. October is a time for reflection, especially on the momentous contribution of the volunteers and staff who look after the livelihood of our elderly, disabled and those with special needs.

This week in particular has been designated Meals on Wheels Week. A simple definition of the Meals on Wheels program is that it provides meals to housebound individuals who are unable to provide meals for themselves. They are the volunteers who give unselfishly of their time and energy to deliver the meals, including on weekends.

We would be remiss if we did not also praise the organizations in our community offering such a service. Let us not forget a most important aspect of this service, one that goes beyond filling the nutritious needs: the social component. To the housebound senior or disabled individual it means there is someone who cares enough who will be arriving with a meal.

Meals on Wheels means seniors can avoid more costly stays in hospitals and long-term facilities. It enables earlier discharge from or delaying admission to these facilities. Throughout Meals on Wheels Week, let us all in our own way be thankful to everyone involved for supporting the elderly, the disabled and those with special needs.

ARLENE ROUSSEAU

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): This afternoon I want to very briefly tell you, and perhaps more so the people from down Windsor way, that one of their favourite daughters, Arlene Rousseau, who has been hospitalized now for a considerable length of time, has been with great courage and tenacity — a courage and tenacity she has displayed in every other aspect of her life — fighting the illnesses that have plagued her.

People in Windsor and across this province whose lives have been touched by Arlene as a social activist, yes, as a very partisan New Democrat who has never been afraid to take on giants, who has always been there supporting other people, say to Arlene that we wish her a full recovery. We very much want to see Arlene Rousseau back in good health, back active in her community, back, yes, taking on the titans in her typically iconoclastic way, as cheerful and friendly and giving and generous a person as one could ever find, but also as tough a fighter as any partisan would ever encounter in politics, be it on the municipal scene, on the provincial scene or herself as an activist federally in the New Democratic Party as well.

I say to Arlene, on behalf of all of those people who have worked with her and hope to continue to work with her, a full and speedy recovery.

ABANDONED RAILWAY LINES

Mr Allan K. McLean (Simcoe East): In my riding of Simcoe East there is some discussion regarding the use of abandoned railway lines between Barrie and Orillia, including the land within the city of Orillia. In some areas the abandoned railway land is adjacent to large parcels of developing property, and there may be consideration by developers and/or municipalities to fold this land into a development package. I, personally, feel the best use of this greenbelt area is public use. It is very important for the people of this province to preserve this land in partnership with the municipalities, conservation authorities and other public and private organizations for public use, including recreation, health, fitness and conservation. The city of Toronto is turning over the CN vacant land to mega-developers for high-rise condos. Let's not make the same mistake in rural Ontario.

Currently in my riding, the township of Tiny has kept the abandoned CN railway track as a public recreation trail for safe hiking, biking and horseback riding. In Hastings county, the 155 kilometres of land between Glen Ross and Lake St Peter are a multi-use corridor for recreation and tourism purposes. In western Ontario, the land links Elora, Fergus, Hillsburgh and Erin with the forks of the Credit, again for recreation and tourism uses.

Since the die has been successfully cast in other regions of the province, I would ask the government and the municipalities to protect the abandoned railway rights-of-way between Barrie, Orillia, Midland and Penetanguishene as a greenbelt corridor for year-round public enjoyment.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): I'm very happy today to be here to present over 650 letters on behalf of teachers from my riding and certainly the schools across Windsor and Essex county. If I may read this letter to the Honourable John Snobelen:

"Dear Mr Snobelen:

"I am a teacher in the Windsor-Essex county area and I have no desire to go on strike. However, I believe through legislation, you will destroy not only the rights of our teaching profession but also the quality of our education system in Ontario.

"Please reconsider your government's actions before you further damage the learning environment of my students."

This is signed by Mrs W. Roshfeld from Holy Names school.

I would also like to note that Alena DiFazio, Jackie Jamail-Lopez and Henry John Harwood from Holy Names have written to us with the same message to the minister. We have a number of schools: St Josephs High School, Luigi DiFazio. There's a letter from Charles Church talking very briefly about:

"I'm a teacher in Windsor and I do not wish to end up on strike. However, if your government insists on tabling your announced reforms to the education system in Ontario, you leave me little choice but to hit the bricks.

"I'm at a loss why you believe that eliminating permanent contracts and turning us into indentured servants will make better education in this province."

Let's remember that this is about cuts to education, and we must support the teachers in Windsor and Essex county.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): Yesterday, in the afternoon, there were hundreds and hundreds of students who left their schools and came here to the front lawn to protest in support of their teachers. The numbers of students now reach over the thousands who have walked out, hit the streets themselves and said, "We support our teachers on this." Last night we saw over 20,000 teachers gather at Maple Leaf Gardens.

The level of anxiety and impending crisis is as high as I have ever seen it in this province. I want to implore the government, the Premier and the Minister of Education to please step in and cool the temperature down, because I worry about the 2.1 million students out there who are going to be affected by this. We have got teachers and students and parents and communities very worried. It is the government's responsibility now to step back and to take the rhetoric down.

The minister continues to incite this situation when he calls teachers' demonstrating "of no import." Please, Mr Minister, it is your responsibility. You may want change, but it doesn't have to be this way. Put the bill aside, get the funding formula out, work with people to show how education reform will improve education and not just cut it, and maybe you can restore some credibility and some calm and ensure our kids get their education.

OKTOBERFEST

Mr Gary L. Leadston (Kitchener-Wilmot): I'm rising in the House today to remind everyone that October 10 through 18 is the annual Oktoberfest celebration in Kitchener-Waterloo.

In 29 years, K-W Oktoberfest has developed its own traditions, becoming the largest Bavarian festival in North America, with the greatest Thanksgiving Day parade in Canada. Thousands of visitors celebrate annually in 21 festhallen or by attending one or more of their 45 family and cultural events.

Through the celebration of the spirit of gemütlichkeit, the local economy is stimulated and over 70 charities and not-for-profit organizations benefit financially. Willkommen to all members of the House and to the people of Ontario to visit Kitchener and Waterloo and enjoy the celebration.

1340

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Many people in Ontario were favourably impressed when, during the leaders' debate in May 1995 in the provincial election campaign, Conservative leader Mike Harris stated, in reply to a question from one of the panellists in the news media, "Certainly I can guarantee you it is not my plan to close hospitals." No mention was made of drastically changing the role of or closing any Niagara region hospitals. No indication was given that the doors of any St Catharines hospital would be closed as a result of any policy contained in the so-called Common Sense Revolution of the Ontario Conservative Party. The Premier was firm and blunt when he promised that it was not his plan to close hospitals.

At the launch of the 50th anniversary of the Hotel Dieu Hospital in St Catharines last Friday, a letter from Premier Harris was read that contained the following sentence: "Please accept my best wishes for this year's celebration and for the many more years to come." With the axe hanging over the head of the Hotel Dieu Hospital as a result of the Niagara Hospital Restructuring Committee report, based upon enormous projected cuts in hospital operating budgets by the Harris government, I will take the word of Premier Harris that he will guarantee he has no plans to close hospitals and that he sees Hotel Dieu continuing to exist for many more years to come.

I'll be kind enough as well to interpret that guarantee and those wishes to extend to the St Catharines General Hospital and the Shaver Hospital as well.

COLLÈGE BORÉAL

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): Francophone education in northern Ontario took a giant leap forward on Saturday when Collège Boréal in Sudbury had a successful opening gala. The member for Sudbury East and I were pleased to see the final product of an objective we had while in government. At the opening, a great many

people came up to me and told me, "If it hadn't been for the NDP government's commitment to francophone education and training, Collège Boréal would never have happened." The francophone community of northeastern Ontario realizes one of their goals: post-secondary education in their northern communities, in their own language.

I want to congratulate the people who formed the collective so many years ago and never lost sight of their goal. Their dedication and hard work has paid off. The new facilities and other campuses across northern Ontario are a direct result of their efforts.

I look forward to Collège Boréal building a proud tradition of excellence in education and producing a long line of top-notch graduates. I have long maintained that when any part of our community suffers in its level of education and training, we all pay the price. I hope the Minister of Education is listening.

Collège Boréal is a positive move towards equalizing opportunities for francophones in the north. It is a tremendous leap forward for the north as a whole. Félicitations à nos amis au Collège Boréal.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Ted Arnott (Wellington): In recent days I've had an opportunity to speak with staff at Minto-Clifford public school and Centre Wellington District High School regarding the provincial government's plans for education reform, and last Thursday I had a chance to meet with representatives of the high school teachers' federation in Wellington. I believe that the vast majority of teachers are devoted to their students and strive for excellence in education. The advice of our teachers is crucial to the government as they contemplate changes to the education system.

Bill 160 is a proposal; it is not yet law. Through consultation, suggestions will be considered and changes are very likely to occur. The minister sincerely wants to improve the education system, but he needs the help of all of our partners in education. The teachers' position at present is different from the province's position on Bill 160. That is a given. But this gap will not be bridged by engaging in extreme rhetoric. We will only solve our differences through calm, reasoned discussion. I'm very pleased that the Minister of Education has offered to meet with the teachers' federation and I'm pleased that they've accepted his invitation. We all lose if the teachers walk out, but most of all this action would hurt students.

I believe that some of us need to be reminded that this action would be illegal. No member of the Legislature can condone or endorse it. I know that some teachers question the need for the proposed changes to education. However, the provincial government still has a $6.6-billion deficit and a debt that's growing. The government has a mandate to balance the budget and there's a public consensus that we must stop adding to our provincial debt.

As MPP for Wellington, I want to encourage the government and our teachers to work —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Education and Training. Last night, you will know, something probably unprecedented in the history of this province took place. Over 20,000 teachers appeared on the front lawn of this building here at Queen's Park. I know you are making desperate efforts to marginalize our teachers and to make the argument that somehow these people are entirely self-interested. I can tell you without any hesitation whatsoever that our teachers are out there in defence of public education. That's what this is all about.

They understand implicitly, because they are there on the front lines, that your cuts have already hurt students. They know that firing thousands of teachers is not going to improve education in Ontario and they know that taking another $1 billion out of our schools is not going to improve education.

My question is this: Have you learned your lesson? Will you now agree not to take a further penny out of education in Ontario?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): If the Leader of the Opposition was surprised by the ability of teachers' unions in Ontario to stage a rally, I can tell you that you are the only one in the province who is surprised. Certainly this is not without precedent. If the Leader of the Opposition will look back in time he will find there have been similar protests against virtually every government in Ontario and against provincial governments of every political stripe across Canada as they've gone through the changes Ontario is now in the face of, on how to improve our education system so we can make sure we're offering the best to our students. So it's not surprising.

We hope the talks we have scheduled now with the heads of the teachers' unions for tomorrow will be fruitful. It will be an opportunity to sit down and discuss the issues in front of us, how to improve student achievement in Ontario, in a very civilized way, in a way where we can get to the issues and talk about them fruitfully.

Mr McGuinty: Last night I told Ontario teachers something they are dying to hear from you. I told them that in Ontario we value teaching, that in Ontario we value our teachers, and that in Ontario we understand one of the single most important responsibilities our government and our teachers have got to share is to teach our young.

That's what I told them and that's what you should be telling them. Do you know what you're telling them instead? You're telling them you can't trust them. Your own Premier said, "We can't trust Ontario teachers to deliver quality education." He actually said that. Teaching our kids is one of the most important things we can do and Bill 160 stands against that. Minister, once again, will you pull us back from the brink? Tell us this bill is not about taking thousands of teachers out of our schools.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition, instead of having to go to the exercise of having speechwriters write his material, would just look up in Hansard the many, many times I have stood in this House and said repeatedly that the backbone of our education system is our teachers, that they are among the most highly qualified teachers anywhere in the world.

I have said on many occasions over the course of the last two months that I respect the honesty, the dignity, the integrity and the ethics of the teachers in Ontario, and that's why I believe they don't want to participate in any illegal action, particularly not honouring their contracts or their obligations to students. The Leader of the Opposition has not shown that faith in teachers. He has said the opposite.

Mr McGuinty: The minister is suddenly singing a different tune. He now tells us that Ontario teachers are indeed responsible and that they are good and that they are doing what it takes in the classroom. I can tell you they really feel that responsibility. In particular, they feel their responsibility to protect public education and that's why they were there last night, 24,000 strong, because they understand what Bill 160 is all about. It's about taking teachers out of our teachers out of our schools, it's about taking another $1 billion out of our classrooms. We're going to be into Thanksgiving pretty soon. Maybe it's time you took this turkey off the table.

Tonight thousands more teachers across the province will be meeting in protest of Bill 160. Minister, surely you will have learned your lesson by this point in time. Can you take us back from the brink? Would you withdraw Bill 160? If you can't do that, at least let's put it on the shelf so we can avoid a province-wide strike.

1350

Hon Mr Snobelen: Having had the bill in the House for some time now, a couple of weeks, the Leader of the Opposition has now made his substantive contribution to how we should improve education in Ontario. He has also stated I think very clearly the view of his party on student performance and improving student performance in the province, and that is: "Put it off. Don't improve it. Leave it mediocre. Don't help our students." That's your approach, sir. That's not our approach.

We will take on the tough questions. We are looking forward to substantive discussions with teachers' unions so we can resolve the issue of growing class size, of growing education property taxes and of a decline in the quality of education in Ontario. We will spend the time, we will expend the energy and we will not try to avoid the tough questions as you have, sir.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): In the absence of the Minister of Health, I'll go to the Deputy Premier. Over a month ago I raised a concern in this House about emergency departments closing their doors to ambulances in the Metro Toronto area, and they were doing that because they were too busy; they simply couldn't handle the load. I raised that with the Minister of Health and he simply dismissed my concerns out of hand.

Yesterday at noon we learned that 16 of 21 area hospitals were turning away patients because they were filled to capacity right here in Toronto. That has, to my knowledge, never happened before in Ontario, never. What you have done to date is you have cut about $1 billion from Ontario hospital budgets, so I'm going to put the question to you this time: Do you still maintain that your cuts aren't affecting patient care?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): First of all, we are spending more money than ever before on health care in Ontario, some $18.5 billion. I know that the member from Thunder Bay, when she was the leader of your party, promised to spend $17 billion a year. We're spending $1.5 billion more than your party would have, had you been elected in June 1995.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Oriole, come to order, please. I want to be able to hear the minister's response and I can't.

Hon Mr Eves: Second of all, any suggestion that emergency services are being reduced or negatively affected by restructuring is false. No facilities have closed in Metropolitan Toronto; none whatsoever, I say to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr McGuinty: The minister maintains that somehow he's bringing about improvement in health care. You've taken nearly $1 billion out of Ontario hospital budgets. Let's talk about some of the details of what happened yesterday right here in Metro Toronto: Eight of those 20 emergency wards were turning away all calls, even the most critical, life-threatening calls. Eight out of 20 emergency wards in Metropolitan Toronto said, "Don't send us anybody, no matter how critical the case." That's happening in your Ontario.

Furthermore, there wasn't a single emergency room accepting patients in all of Scarborough; not a single one. Remember, this is what is happening. This is what is happening right now. This is the status quo. You know what you've introduced into this? You've said: "We'll cut six more emergency departments. We'll shut down six hospitals." What you're doing in the face of a tremendous effort on the part of emergency departments to cope with the load is you're saying, "We're going to get rid of six of you." Where are all those emergency patients going to go when you cut the next six emergency departments?

Hon Mr Eves: The honourable member might want to apprise the public, when he's up here grandstanding today, that every single hospital in the Metropolitan Toronto region indicated that it would accept any life-threatening case yesterday. I didn't hear that in the preamble to his question. That wouldn't suit his political purpose.

Hospitals going on redirect consideration or critical care bypass is absolutely nothing new, I say to the leader of the official opposition. He should know because Elinor Caplan put this system in place when she was the Minister of Health in the Liberal David Peterson government, and

it's there for a proper purpose. It was properly done by David Peterson and Elinor Caplan. The system is there to accommodate certain situations. It works and it functions well, and it did yesterday, and not one single critical care patient was turned away yesterday. You leaving any other impression simply is not correct, sir.

Mr McGuinty: Maybe I should quote a story for the purposes of the minister so he better understands what I'm talking about here. The Toronto Star says, "Eight hospital emergency wards were so busy they refused to accept patients arriving in ambulances for a half-hour period, no matter how serious the patient's condition — a rare situation called 'critical care bypass.'" I'm not talking about redirect consideration here, I'm talking about critical care bypass. Perhaps the minister will be given an opportunity shortly to answer me.

Minister, what we're talking about here is a number of —

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): Just what are we talking about?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members for Nepean, Lambton.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, eight emergency wards were put on critical care bypass. That means no matter how sick you are, no matter how dangerous your condition, they can't receive you because they're too busy. That's what that means.

The Speaker: Questions?

Mr McGuinty: This has, to my knowledge, never, ever happened before in Metropolitan Toronto, and it's happening in Windsor too. You may feel this is satisfactory for health care in Ontario, but I don't. Why not postpone your hospital closures and why not restore your cuts until you can guarantee —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Eves: I reiterate to the leader of the official opposition, no restructuring has taken place yet, no emergency departments have closed down. He would know that the Health Services Restructuring Commission report — and I'm sure he wanted to get this out in the public — recommends, and it will be done, that six emergency departments will be expanded upon and improved when restructuring takes place. He also knows, or should know, that redirect consideration —

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm going to tell the members for Windsor-Sandwich and for Oakwood, I'm warning you now, don't heckle any more. I want to hear the minister's response.

Hon Mr Eves: Redirect consideration or critical care bypass was implemented as a safety valve by your government because they thought it was needed, and they were correct. It is needed from time to time. It is indeed a rare occasion on which these things occur.

The Speaker: Answer, please.

Hon Mr Eves: But I say to the honourable member, we are spending $18.5 billion in the health care system. He said, on September 22, 1996, "I am convinced that there's" —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Minister of Finance, can you please come to order. I'll warn the member. Thank you.

1400

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I have a question for the Minister of Education and Training. From the minister and from members of his party over the last weeks, we have heard repeatedly that the opposition to Bill 160 doesn't come from rank-and-file teachers across the province but only from "union bosses" and "activists" — the terms they have used. Obviously the rally and demonstration last night has put paid to that notion.

Everyone in the province except, apparently, the Minister of Education and Training and his government knows that we face a very critical situation, where Ontario teachers have been pushed to the brink of a province-wide strike, disrupting the education of students across the province. Some 24,000 teachers rallied in Toronto last night. They made it clear: The minister has created this situation; now he has to fix it.

I'm asking the minister what he is going to do to avert a disruption to the education of the students in this province. Does he have a plan to avert this crisis now that he has created it?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): Let's be clear about who created what in the province. You left our students with a school system that produced mediocre results. You left our students with a debt of $41,000 each, a debt that diminishes their future and their future prospects, an education system that diminished their future and their future prospects and the prospects of this province. That's your legacy to the students of Ontario.

We have been working very hard over the last two years in building a better quality of education for our students. We have been addressing the tough questions. We have been asking: Why aren't our students performing better than other students in Canada? Are our dollars directed in a way that makes a difference with our students? Are we measuring the quality issues we should be measuring, and measuring them carefully? We are addressing those questions one by one, as we build a better foundation for our students. That's what this is all about. We won't rest until the students in Ontario have the best performance of any students in Canada.

Mr Wildman: This from a minister who says it's time to cool the rhetoric; this from a minister who, at the same time, tells teachers they've got to grow up; this from a minister who refuses to accept that teachers, parents and students have legitimate complaints about his actions and the legislation he is putting forward on behalf of the government. He suggests that the thousands of teachers who are rallying this week across Ontario and considering that they may have to take strike action are somehow dishonourable if they do that. This from a minister who

last week said, "I believe our system has failed teachers." I'm asking the minister, is he prepared to begin serious and sincere negotiations tomorrow when he meets with the representatives of the teachers' federations, or are we just going to hear more slogans from the Common Sense Revolution?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I'm glad that we'll have the opportunity tomorrow to begin a substantive conversation with the teachers' unions on issues that we think are important to the students of the province. That includes an ability to end the growth in class size in the province — we're very concerned about that; to address the time that teachers spend in class with their students, particularly in the high school panel; to look at the time that students have to spend on task in Ontario. We know that in Alberta there are about 1,000 hours for a student in high school; in Ontario there are about 850 hours. We think we're selling our students short in time on task. We want to talk to them about how they can be backed up by experts in the classroom so our students have the opportunity to learn from the very best experts in the field under the supervision of certified teachers.

Those are issues for the students for the future of Ontario, and we believe they must be addressed and that we must have an adult conversation about those issues. That will begin tomorrow.

Mr Wildman: I guess the minister just told teachers again that they have to grow up.

The minister says that the system has failed teachers. In our view, the minister has failed to meet his responsibility to provide a sound, equitable and quality education system for the students in this province. The minister seems ready to let thousands of teachers walk out in protest over his power grab in Bill 160. I'm asking the minister to cool down the situation, to amend Bill 160, to leave teachers' working conditions and students' learning conditions to the collective bargaining process rather than centralizing it in his own hands. I'm asking the minister to commit today that any and all savings from school board restructuring will be reinvested in the education system to benefit our students. Will the minister make those commitments on the eve of his meeting with the teachers?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The member for Algoma should know that what you left our students was a mediocre system. We have improved that, with better curriculum, expectations on a grade-by-grade basis, a province-wide report card, an outside agency measuring the student performance in the province, because we think it's that important. We've had a number of improvements to our education system over the last two years. We'll continue to have those improvements.

But at the end of the day, I want to assure the member for Algoma that when we meet tomorrow what will be on the table is this government's commitment to having a better education system for our students, this government's commitment to making the changes that other provinces have already made, so we can get ahead of the education train instead of being where you left us, sir, the caboose on the education train in Canada. We will make those changes.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I have another question for the Minister of Education and Training, since the last answer was so enlightening.

The teachers' rally last night really shows how out of touch the minister is with what's happening among teachers in this province. There are solutions for the crisis looming for our students. The minister claims he didn't cut classroom education: He only took $800 million from school boards, and he knows they had no option but to pass those cuts on to students and classrooms. If the minister were to ask parents and students across Ontario if the cuts he made have affected their classrooms, he'd hear a resounding yes.

There's one solution. The minister should promise today that there will be no more cuts to the education budget under his government. Will the minister make that commitment?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I guess it's time to correct the record. The member for Algoma has made some suggestions that I don't believe can be backed up by fact. I think if he looks carefully, he'll find the spending year over year in the province of Ontario has gone up in education although the enrolment has gone down.

We did present the boards with a challenge to find savings in administration and in the bureaucracy of education, to find those savings. We did present them with that challenge. Their response was to increase property taxes. Their response was to increase the amount of money spent in education while enrolment went down.

We have to have a better funding system for our students. We've taken that on. We have a blank page, and our question is this: What does it take to provide a first-quality education for every student in the province? We will meet that figure and we will do that with the interests of our students first and foremost in our minds.

Mr Wildman: After the minister took $800 million out of the classrooms of this province, he then brought in Bill 104, which gutted the power of school boards and local control over education in communities. He gave trustees the responsibility of representing vastly larger areas and many more students, and yet he put a limit on what they could do. The minister has taken away the power of school boards to raise revenues but left them in charge of negotiating salaries and benefits for teachers and education workers and for meeting the needs of their students and their communities, without any power to make decisions.

Surely the minister can at least make the promise today that any and all savings taken out of school board restructuring will be reinvested in the education of our students and our schools. I'm pleading with the minister to make that commitment to the students, the parents and the teachers of the province.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I'm pleased to tell the member for Algoma that time and time again I have stood in this chamber and said that we will meet whatever the figure is to provide a first-quality education to every student in the province. We mean that. That is why we're going through the hard work of a zero-based budget, looking at what our students need, making sure we can adjust it across the province for changing needs for different students, making sure we get the funding right, because we owe that to our students, and we will do that.

1410

Perhaps the member for Algoma has missed quotes from people who have looked at the system. Let me read a quote to you. "We spend per capita more on education than most other places in the world. I think it's a question of focus and a question of how we can get the system to do its job." I agree with that quote — Bob Rae, the Ottawa Citizen, February 6, 1992.

Mr Wildman: The comments the minister is quoting and is making here today show how out of touch he is with those teachers who packed Maple Leaf Gardens last night, Carlton Street and the lawn out in front of the Legislature. The minister thinks that by saying he won't remove the teachers' right to strike or their representation by their federations, he has satisfied their concerns about Bill 160. But the minister has left in the bill two of the things that are closest to teachers' hearts: their professionalism and their right to collectively bargain their working conditions and their students' learning conditions. The minister uses rhetoric about teachers' professionalism, saying they won't go on strike because of it, but then he uses regulatory powers to remove that professionalism from them and to put non-professionals in the classroom to teach students.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Your question?

Mr Wildman: There's a solution to this crisis. The minister should drop the list of non-negotiables and go to the meeting tomorrow with the representatives of the teachers in a truly open and honest —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I disagree with the member for Algoma. I know he won't be surprised. I believe that the thing closest to the hearts of the teachers of Ontario is the future of their students. The only thing that is non-negotiable in going into our talks tomorrow is the future of the students in the province of Ontario. That's the only thing that's not negotiable.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I have a question again to the Deputy Premier. I want to talk to you about your hospital destruction commission and the way it continues to threaten rural hospitals. Earlier this year, your Minister of Health said that the rural hospitals needed a different approach than large urban areas; that new benchmarks would be found to deal with those rural hospitals. There was a sudden awakening at the last minute to try to put that in place.

But now we find that the Lambton report, which occasioned all of this, has come out, and guess what? The commission didn't use any rural benchmarks; they used the same old benchmarks they used everywhere else. They've cut the beds 40% in that area. We need to know —

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton): You've got your facts all wrong. Read the report.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Lambton, come to order, please. Members for Etobicoke-Humber and Grey-Owen Sound, please come to order.

Mr Kennedy: No doubt, Deputy Premier, the member for Lambton would be very interested to know that at the very same time the commission was releasing its report, the committee setting the benchmarks for rural hospitals was still meeting at the OHA, so there's no way they're using those things.

The people in Grimsby, Petrolia, Walkerton, Port Colborne and Fort Erie want to know: Have you misled them, or is there really a rural health policy, and will it take precedence over what we saw happen last week?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): The honourable member knows quite well that there is indeed a rural health care policy and the Health Services Restructuring Commission is obliged to take that into account when they're making decisions about these issues.

Mr Kennedy: Deputy Premier, that cannot be very much consolation to the people of Petrolia, who don't know now that 22 beds is all they're going to have at maximum, and that has been set by the same old benchmarks. I'll tell you what the people of Petrolia want. They want what has come to be known as the Burk's Falls standard. They want that policy, which allows local people to say they want a hospital and get to keep one.

Minister, I'll put it to you again: The head of the commission says the new policy is just something he'll take under advisement but he's going to go and visit every single rural community. The commission is going to go there. At the same time, the ministry is working with the hospitals, setting up committees, it has mediators and it hasn't even finished the benchmarks yet. Which is it going to be? Is this government finally going to take charge of health care policy or was this all a public relations sham, and you're actually going to let those hospitals shut down without a proper process that takes their special needs into account?

Hon Mr Eves: I am advised that the Health Care Restructuring Commission has deferred its decision on the Petrolia hospital until the Lambton District Health Council has completed its application of the rural health care framework for Lambton county. This isn't the first time that this same honourable member has exaggerated the facts, to put it kindly, coming into this House with respect to health care structuring.

You might be interested to know what the CEO of Humber River Regional Hospital said to the honourable member in a letter of September 12, "You seem most

interested in generating fear within the community around safety and quality of care provided to individuals regardless of whether or not the facts support this conclusion." You've done it here again today. You are not credible. You are not believable.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Durham East — everybody is out of order for heckling, but you are also out of order for not being in your seat. In fact, I'm not even sure where you sit any more, to be quite honest with you. New question, third party. Member for London Centre.

HOME CARE

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): My question is to the junior minister responsible for seniors and long-term care. It concerns the crisis your government is creating with the provision of home care services. Underneath the looming financial crisis that faces the Red Cross is the your government's vision of competition in the provision of community-based long-term-care services and the havoc it is creating with the stability and quality of those services.

The competitive marketplace model you're insisting on imposing in this area is systematically driving down wages of the workers and the hours of service available to the people who depend on those workers. Your ministry's own guidelines for the bidding process that service providers now must follow indicate quite clearly that in order to compete, providers have to cut down wages or the number of service hours or even both.

Minister, this is the real problem facing the Red Cross. We sent a letter to the Minister of Health asking him to meet with us, the Red Cross and employee representatives in order to straighten the mess out. He hasn't responded. He's not here again today. Will you meet with us to discuss this issue?

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Briefly, I just want to be clear: The title is Minister without Portfolio responsible for Seniors Issues. I would ask that you address him in that fashion.

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister without Portfolio [Seniors Issues]): First of all I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I want to assure the member that her characterization of the substantive infrastructure of home care in this province is not as she would have this House believe. The truth is that there were several problems associated with home care in this province. It was underfunded by the previous government. There was not consistent assessment of seniors, whether they were living in your riding in London or in your colleague's riding of Hamilton.

The truth is that we have an accountable system. We flowed additional dollars to expand health care services. Frankly, whether or not people compete to provide higher quality at a good price is not the issue in this province. The issue is that this government has increased growth dollars for home care in this province by about $170 million, not only in the home care panel but also forming part of community-based supports, and her own community of London has benefited from that.

1420

Mrs Boyd: Minister, you obviously don't get it. Driving down the wages of workers and lowering the standards of care are not going to build healthy communities. Moreover, you still have a very serious problem with hard-to-serve communities. Your competitive model provides for a transition period for current providers so that they have a protected share of the market. You call it a market. We call it health care.

The transition package provides for a minimum wage which is below current Red Cross wage rates. Leave out the whole pay equity problem and you still have a looming crisis for the Red Cross.

The Red Cross is the sole provider for home care in 45 hard-to-serve areas and, given the size of their operation, they can operate in some communities in the red only because they have the size to carry that operation in other communities.

The Speaker: Question?

Mrs Boyd: The Red Cross has higher wage costs and a decent benefit package and your competitive model is trying to drive providers who provide decent wages and competitive benefit packages out of business. When will you respond —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Jackson: The features of home care in Ontario are designed for the patient and the client first. Their services are required as the first component part of how we develop our health care system.

Second, I remind the member opposite, a former cabinet minister in the government who waited for five years and never did implement long-term care, that under your plan you were going to close down the Red Cross and turn that into a civil service position and you weren't going to protect those workers.

The government of Mike Harris has taken the thousands of workers in this province and it has said to them and agencies like VON, Red Cross, visiting homemakers and St Elizabeth — do you know where the word "market" came up? We said to those workers: "Your jobs are protected in this province. Your pay is protected in this province. Your market share" — that you referred to — "is protected in this province." It's only by bringing 170 million new dollars into home care that we've been able to deliver on that election promise, something you didn't do in five years.

Mrs Boyd: That is not true. You cut off pay equity.

The Speaker: Member for London Centre, you must withdraw that heckle, that comment I heard, the fact that what he was suggesting wasn't true.

Mrs Boyd: Mr Speaker —

The Speaker: No, just withdraw or not. I heard you say it.

Mrs Boyd: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you. New question. Member for Quinte.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. My constituents quite often ask me about the state of the provincial highways, roads that have been left too long with improper repair, making driving not only uncomfortable and inconvenient but sometimes downright dangerous. As we are nearing the end of the construction season, I think it would be appropriate to tell us how much has been done this year to improve the state of the highways in Ontario.

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): My colleague is absolutely correct about the condition of some of our highways. Previous governments have allowed the deterioration of some of our roads by not spending the dollars that were required. I am pleased to tell the member for Quinte that this year our construction budget is $562 million. We are again spending over $300 million on rehabilitation projects to protect the $30-billion investment we have, something previous governments had forgotten all about. That's a lot more money than the previous governments have ever spent, and at the same time we are still going ahead with a few key expansion projects such as Highway 416. Finally the nation's capital is going to have a four-lane highway from the 401.

Mr Rollins: Dollar figures are well and good, but I would like to know how much road work we actually did this year, how many highways we repaired and how many bridges we fixed.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Quinte.

Mr Rollins: I'll start over again. The dollar figures we know to be expressed quite nicely, but I would like to know exactly how many roads we have fixed and how many bridges we have spent time on. Could you give us that information for this summer?

Hon Mr Palladini: This year the ministry will have completed the rehabilitation of approximately 4,800 kilometres of highway — to put that in perspective, that's just about the length of Canada — the rehabilitation or replacement of 167 bridges, as the member pointed out, and 120 projects to improve safety on our highways.

I think all members would be interested to know that the ministry is continually looking to reduce overheads so more of our dollars go into the roads, with any savings being reinvested in our highways and bridges. For example, the ministry usually spends between 70% and 74% of the highway capital budget on construction. The figure this year is going to be over 80%.

We will protect our highway infrastructure with the funding support that's required because we know how important it is to Ontario's economy not only from that point but also from a safety standpoint, something that previous governments neglected to do.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Minister of Finance and it has to do with the impact on property taxes of Mike Harris's plan to dump costs on to municipalities.

We know from the figures you released that the plan is to add about $660 million of costs to municipalities when you take into account that you are discontinuing next year the municipal support grant program. Mike Harris said on August 6 that across the province property tax cuts should average 5% to 10%. So the government is planning to add, on an ongoing basis, about $660 million to the cost for municipalities, but Mike Harris said they should reduce property taxes, on average, 5% to 10%. Can you explain for the people of Ontario how the property taxes will be cut by 5% to 10% when you're adding $660 million of costs?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): The Premier also said that if municipalities can find 2.7% efficiencies in their operations — and they certainly should be able to do that; I haven't talked to a municipal leader who says he or she can't do that — it will be a break-even proposition. If they can do that for three consecutive years, for sure they can find a 5% to 10% savings in their taxes.

Mr Phillips: Actually, that does not take into account at all the $660 million you're adding in costs.

The Premier himself engaged David Crombie and the Who Does What panel, 15 of the most trusted people Mike Harris could find, to look at this issue. They said, "We strongly oppose putting social housing, social assistance and child care on to the property tax." In fact, they said they were unanimous against that. The reason is that if we run into an economic downturn, property taxes are not the place where social housing and social assistance should be funded. That's what Dave Crombie said; that's what the panel said.

I assume the government has modelled this, has looked at it, has studied it, and understands the increased cost that will be put on property taxes when we run into an economic downturn. The question is, will you agree to release those impact studies on what impact this will have on property taxes when we run into an economic downturn? I think the people of Ontario want to know what the impact will be on property taxes and the terrific increase we could face on property taxes in the future with an economic downturn.

1430

Hon Mr Eves: The honourable member is aware that the government presented its Who Does What plan to municipalities. AMO and also representatives of ROMA, FONOM and large urban municipalities came back to the government with their proposal for delineation of responsibilities. We accepted.

He will also know that in accepting their proposal, the social assistance cost was reduced from 50% to 20% for municipalities. Most municipalities are already paying 20%, and have been, depending on the particular municipality in which you happen to reside. The municipalities came to us with this proposal. They thought it was a fair proposal. We accepted it.

PAY EQUITY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): My question is to the minister responsible for women's issues. We learned today that the government has decided not to appeal the decision restoring proxy pay equity to 100,000 of the lowest-paid women in the broader public sector. Finally, you accepted the judge's ruling that Bill 26 was unconstitutional when it tried to take this money away. This is truly good news, but only if the government now lives up to its responsibility to provide pay equity funding to the women's shelters, nursing homes, home care providers, child care centres and other agencies that are the employers of these women.

Minister, it will be a cruel hoax indeed if you download the costs of your foolish Bill 26 decision on to the agencies, forcing them to reduce services and eliminate jobs because of your government's incompetence. Will you commit today to full provincial funding for proxy pay equity?

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for women's issues): In response to the member's question, we did decide not to appeal the O'Leary decision on proxy pay equity and the court's decision about the proxy pay equity obligations of the broader public sector employers.

In response to your specific question about how we're going to deal with the other agencies that may be coping with this challenge, we now know that we have already committed up to $500 million in funding towards pay equity in the broader public sector. I am aware and will be made more aware of any implications that may take place as a result of this ruling today. I will be discussing this with my colleagues, and I cannot answer your question directly at this time.

Ms Churley: Minister, you don't get it still, do you? You're not listening to the people of Ontario, because I can tell you they want you to stop financing your tax cuts on the backs of the women of this province. We have had enough. We're talking about fair pay for women and we're talking about the vital health care and community services that we need now and for the future.

Let me remind you what the judge's ruling said on this issue. He said that to implement his decision without full provincial funding would send large numbers of the employers of these women into bankruptcy. That would be terrible for the women of Ontario and destructive for the kind of healthy communities we need to be building in our province. What part of the judge's ruling do you not understand?

Hon Mrs Cunningham: Because I haven't had an opportunity to talk to the finance minister, I would like to refer this question to the Minister of Finance, who will be able to answer the question.

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I can say quite directly to the honourable member, the government has decided not to appeal the decision. We will make sure the broader public sector employers not only obey the decision but have the ability to live up to and fund the decision.

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Centre): My question today is to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, who has the responsibility for the Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

In speaking with many of my constituents in Scarborough Centre, they have expressed support for the pilot Sunday opening project that the LCBO had during the month of August this year. One of the reasons they want to shop on Sundays at the LCBO is that they enjoy the fine quality of Ontario's wines and they like to have that with their dinner on Sunday.

What can the minister tell my constituents in the riding of Scarborough Centre about the results of this project and the reaction he has received about the project across Ontario and what his intentions are for Sunday shopping in Scarborough Centre and the rest of Ontario?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I thank the member for Scarborough Centre for the question. As I understand it, if you want to see the question and the answer, you can view it on his Web site at www.hellonewman.com.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: I think the opposition parties want to hear that again. That's www.hellonewman.com.

First of all, it was in response to the consumer that we looked at a pilot project in August for the five Sundays. A lot of the demand was coming from border cities or from tourist areas that wanted to see money kept in Ontario. This is driven by consumer demand — we've looked at this in December over the last two years — and so far there's been a fairly positive response.

Looking at some of the response in the media, for example, I think the only negative thing I saw was that one lady was interviewed in the LCBO store on a Sunday. She said she didn't like it, so they asked, "What are you doing here?" She said, "I needed a bottle of wine for my barbecue today and it was convenient for me." I tell you, we're looking for the reaction from the consumer, to respond to them.

I must say as well that we looked at the cross-border shopping issue. The money has stayed in Ontario, which is good for our economy, but we've also noticed an increase in some of the American spending in Ontario because we have greater varieties and a greater range available here. Of course, that's not to disregard the effect it has on reducing the black market and reducing the bootlegging and illegal responses. That's what we see so far.

Mr Newman: I want to thank the minister for his answer and mentioning my Web site, www.hellonewman.com.

Traditionally, Ontario has been slow in terms of opening its LCBO stores on Sundays. Many of my constituents have noticed, as they've travelled across the province,

distilleries, breweries and wineries that sell their projects on Sundays. They wonder why the Liquor Control Board of Ontario is not open.

Other jurisdictions that border Ontario that have their liquor stores open on Sundays. We'd like to know if the minister can explain why the LCBO is not open on Sundays while other stores in Ontario and in those other jurisdictions are.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: The member mentioned the fact that sale of alcoholic beverages is not new in Ontario right now. In fact, currently the micro-breweries, the wineries and also distilleries and wine stores are open on Sundays to sell. In fact, there are 289 of these open, places such as the Amsterdam Brewing Co, for example, which, by the way, is launching two new lines today because of the confidence they have in the Ontario economy, which is creating more jobs.

This is not a new experience in Canada either. New Brunswick and Quebec currently have Sunday sales, as do many of the states which border upon Ontario. The concern we have is to make sure we keep that money in Ontario and make sure the jobs stay in Ontario. Once again this is not an idea we came up with on our own; this idea was also proposed by the OLBEU employees through their solutions. There's been a fair amount of acceptance so far but we haven't completed the studies yet.

1440

ADULT EDUCATION

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): My question is for the Minister of Education and Training. Adult day school programs like the one in my riding at Georges Vanier Secondary School have an 83% success rate in ensuring that young adults move from school to further education or to a job.

Your cuts to date have forced young adults into continuing education programs. These do not offer the prior learning assessment, full-time attention and learning facilities that have meant success rather than failure. What young adults need to know is why you won't commit to adequately funding a proven program, giving adult day schools the funding they need to continue. You will be making these decisions with your funding formula and its recommendations. You will be telling boards how to spend their dollars with your changes in Bill 160.

Minister, stand in your place today and guarantee that your changes will mean full funding for adult day school, and if you won't, what are you going to do to offer students who need this type of education to get off welfare, to get a job, to support both themselves and their families?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I'm pleased the member today has recognized that in the allocation model, the funding which will meet the needs of our students across the province, there is a separate section in the funding to meet the needs of adult students. We recognize that those needs are different than the needs of adolescents, that the responsibility is different to adults than it is to adolescents. Of course that's well established and well documented, and we will meet those needs.

Mr Caplan: It's unbelievable. This minister has no answer. Through his own funding proposals, through his downgrading of adult education, he has effectively removed access to adult education day school in this province. It is shameful. It's absolutely shameful.

Minister, your funding formula and your adult education component of that is a total mystery, not only to yourself but to this House, because you won't unveil the proposals. I have to ask you again, with your elimination of adult day school programs, what programs will you offer young adults?

We have proven education and training programs to get people off welfare, to get a job and to support both themselves and their families. Don't offer them testing. Offer them what they need, a program with an 83% proven success rate. Your changes have brought about this crisis in adult education. Guarantee that you will restore the funding today. Will you commit to that, Minister?

Hon Mr Snobelen: The member opposite should know that this government certainly values adult education. That's why we have a separate component of the allocation model to be dedicated to adult education. The member opposite should know we are doing this on a zero-based formula, so that we look at what are those needs and what does it take to meet those needs, as we are doing with adolescent students.

The member opposite surely does not think adults should be put in a system of education, or at least thrown into a system of education, that was designed for adolescents. He must recognize, I suspect, that those are different needs temporally, different needs in terms of the class number and size and method of delivery. Surely the member opposite would recognize that and recognize that we must address those issues separately from adolescent education. In the past governments have lumped the two together. We've taken them as separate issues, separate sets of needs, separate costs. That's the approach we're talking.

WINDSOR CASINO

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): My question is to the Deputy Premier. Yesterday your response to the member from Windsor about profits from the Windsor Casino can only be characterized as an attempt to backtrack from the commitment the Premier made during the election of 1995 to provide a 10% cut of casino profits to our community.

Minister, you didn't get a chance to finish your answer yesterday and I was hoping you were going to make an announcement. I want to give you an opportunity to complete your response today and ask whether you'll announce when our community can expect an answer as to whether you intend to honour that commitment Mike Harris made of a 10% share of the profits from the Windsor Casino.

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): Far be it from me to get into a dispute and one-upmanship, so to speak, between the member for Windsor-Walkerville and the member for Windsor-Riverside.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): There's no contest, Minister.

Hon Mr Eves: There's no contest. That's coming from another Windsor member, I might add.

I'm sure that the member, if anybody, should be aware of the Bill 8 hearings in the city of Windsor at the time that the entire issue of a casino in the city of Windsor was being discussed. He would be aware that I introduced an amendment to Bill 8 saying that municipalities should be entitled to receive up to 10% of the proceeds from a casino. His party voted against that. In fact, you may have even been one of the members on the committee who voted against it; I'll have to check the record. We wouldn't want to be speaking out of both sides of our mouths, voting against it in committee on Bill 8 and now wanting it.

However, that being set aside, the mayor of Windsor gave some fairly innovative proposals, as I said to the member for Windsor-Walkerville yesterday, to the government. The government is seriously considering those.

Mr Lessard: We know what your position was during the hearings on Bill 8, and you know what our position was. But this was a commitment that was made by Mike Harris during the election of 1995. It wasn't an NDP commitment; it was Mike Harris's commitment. The people in the city of Windsor want to know whether you have any intention of honouring that commitment.

Hon Mr Eves: We are going to do what we can do to respond to the request of the mayor of the city of Windsor. As I said to him quite directly, he has come up with several innovative ways in which he thinks the city of Windsor could be helped, and we are trying to help the city of Windsor. You might have helped them by voting for my amendment when the bill was before the committee in Windsor.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr David Caplan (Oriole): I have a petition regarding Bill 160. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas we cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down" — they won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solutions which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature and agree wholeheartedly.

HOSPITAL FINANCING

Ms Marilyn Churley (Riverdale): I have a petition signed by another 578 people. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Only about 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Women's College Hospital is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to teaching, research and care dedicated to women;

"The World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as its first collaborating centre for women's health in both North and South America;

"Without a self-governing Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and of the world will lose a health resource that is not duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the comprehensive model of women's health pioneered by Women's College Hospital through ensuring self-governance of the one hospital in Ontario dedicated to women's health."

Since I agree wholeheartedly with this petition, I will sign it.

COURT DECISION

Mr Tony Clement (Brampton South): On behalf of the citizens of Brampton from Kennedy Road Tabernacle to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Court of Appeal has ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to ban going topless in public places."

I'm happy to affix my signature as well.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I have a petition from hundreds of teachers in the ridings of Windsor-Walkerville and Windsor-Riverside. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and Mr John Snobelen:

"I am a teacher in Windsor and I do not want to go on strike. However, if through legislation you destroy not only the teaching profession but also the quality of publicly funded education, I will join my colleagues in a province-wide strike.

"Please reconsider your government's actions before you further damage the learning environment of the students entrusted to me."

I'm proud to join the hundreds of teachers from Windsor, Tecumseh and St Clair Beach in signing this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a further petition regarding the need for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton. It reads as follows.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

I proudly add my name to those of my constituents.

COURT DECISION

Mr Frank Klees (York-Mackenzie): I have a petition that was presented to me by Ms Wendy Mullin of Collingwood, Ontario. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Court of Appeal has ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to ban going topless in public places."

There are some 400 signatures on this petition and I am pleased to affix my name to it.

ABORTION

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario health system is overburdened and unnecessary spending must be cut; and

"Whereas pregnancy is not a disease, injury or illness and abortions are not therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the vast majority of abortions are done for reasons of convenience or finance; and

"Whereas the province has the exclusive authority to determine what services will be insured; and

"Whereas the Canada Health Act does not require funding for elective procedures; and

"Whereas there is mounting evidence that abortion is in fact hazardous to women's health; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers funded over 45,000 abortions in 1993 at an estimated cost of $25 million;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cease from providing any taxpayers' dollars for the performance of abortions."

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition from the Service Employees International Union Local 183 in Belleville. It reads as follows:

"Whereas over 80,000 men and women live in nursing homes and homes for the aged in Ontario; and

"Whereas many of these residents have made enormous contributions to our society over the years and yet today, due to inadequate funding, our older citizens, our parents, relatives and friends, are being warehoused; and

"Whereas caregivers in these facilities are run off their feet trying to do the jobs they were hired to do, but day after day they go home feeling stressed and guilty because they are not able to provide the kind of emotional and physical care they feel the residents deserve; and

"Whereas as more and more hospitals are being closed, nursing homes and homes for the aged are being asked to care for sicker, older and more mentally fragile residents without the corresponding increase in resources needed to provide good care.

"Therefore we, the undersigned residents of Ontario, demand that the Legislature of Ontario stop the underfunding of nursing homes and homes for the aged; immediately establish and adequately fund a minimum standard of 2.25 hours of nursing and personal care for each resident, each day, in homes for the aged and nursing homes; ensure that long-term care remain the responsibility of the province — any downloading to the municipalities will result in uneven standards across the province; ensure that long-term care remain in public hands and that it not be sold to private, for-profit nursing homes; and ensure dignity, rights and respect for all residents and workers in nursing homes and homes for the aged."

I add my name to these petitioners.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I am pleased to bring forward a petition signed by about 800 people from around the Niagara Peninsula — St Catharines, Thorold, Welland, Niagara Falls — sponsored by the Lincoln County Humane Society of St Catharines. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ownership of a domestic animal or pet is a responsibility, not a right; and

"Whereas owners have a responsibility to treat their domestic animal with care and utmost concern for their wellbeing; and

"Whereas cruelty to animals should be punished/sanctioned with fines, penalties and/or bans on animal ownership; and

"Whereas inspectors of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals should not be obstructed from carrying out their duties to investigate abuse or neglect;

"We, the undersigned, support the amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

I affix my signature in support.

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LABOUR RELATIONS REFORM

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I have a petition sent to me by Lisa Durocher and Marg Pare, registered nurses with the Ontario Nurses' Association, Local 101, Leamington, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Progressive Conservative government has failed to address the root causes of waste, duplication and unnecessary administration in our health care system; and

"Whereas the provincial government has introduced Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, that makes it easier for employers to reduce the number of front-line staff and to lower their salaries and benefits, and thus causing further deterioration of quality patient care; and

"Whereas Bill 136 also erodes the democratic process by tampering with collective agreements and potentially interfering with workers' choice of bargaining agents;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, and to restructure the health care system in a safe, coordinated and rational way."

In support of this petition, I affix my signature.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Only about 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Women's College Hospital is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to teaching, research and care dedicated to women;

"The World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as its first collaborating centre for women's health in both North and South America;

"Without a self-governing Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and of the world will lose a health resource that is not duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the comprehensive model of women's health pioneered by Women's College Hospital through ensuring self-governance of the one hospital in Ontario dedicated to women's health."

This is signed by 543 people and I'm proud to affix my signature.

COURT DECISION

Mr Frank Klees (York-Mackenzie): I'm pleased to rise to present a petition presented to me by the faith community in my riding, namely from the town of Aurora. It comes to us from the Aurora Cornerstone Ministries, the Aurora Fellowship Baptist Church, the First Baptist Church and Wesley United Church, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Court of Appeal has ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to ban going topless in public places."

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and deals with Bill 160.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas you cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution, which won't work for the students, the parents or the teachers of Ontario."

Of course I affix my signature to this petition.

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WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition regarding the WCB.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas this government's contribution to prevention services made through the WCB has been reduced from $62 million to $47 million, with no explanation as to where this money has gone; and

"Whereas the prevention services that the Ministry of Labour once provided are being offloaded to the Workers' Health and Safety Centre and other safety associations, thereby increasing the demand for the prevention services provided by the centre; and

"Whereas the government has gutted the certification training standards for health and safety committee members and is replacing them with minimalist performance standards which, in combination with funding cuts, have resulted in a 40% reduction in the staff of the Workers' Health and Safety Centre; and

"Whereas the Workers' Health and Safety Centre is facing further cuts of $2.3 million to finance the establishment of several new employer safety associations, thereby duplicating administrative costs and services;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the gutting of the funding of prevention services provided by the Workers' Health and Safety Centre; and

"Further, we, the undersigned, demand that the moneys taken from the health and safety prevention services of the Workers' Health and Safety Centre and other safety associations be returned to them."

I add my name to theirs.

TRAFFIC CONTROL

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I have a petition submitted by Jeannine and François Galipeau which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the volume of traffic travelling along the Queensway between Highway 416 and Moodie Drive has grown steadily in recent years due to population and industrial growth of Kanata, the addition of a third lane to Moodie Drive, the recent expansions at both Nortel and Newbridge, the evolution of the Corel Centre into the home of the Ottawa Senators and Ottawa's premier entertainment arena, and the opening of Highway 416 as the primary route connecting Ottawa to Highway 401; and

"Whereas this increased volume of traffic is producing levels of noise which are disturbing local residents, both during the day and the night;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue to develop the roadways along this section of the Queensway in order to accommodate the increased volume of traffic, but to couple this development with measures including the extension of a berm along the north side of the Queensway in the Crystal Beach area to mitigate the negative aspects caused by this traffic."

Because I'm in complete agreement, I've affixed my own signature thereto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUBLIC SECTOR TRANSITION STABILITY ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 VISANT À ASSURER LA STABILITÉ AU COURS DE LA TRANSITION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr Maves, on behalf of Mrs Witmer, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 136, An Act to provide for the expeditious resolution of disputes during collective bargaining in certain sectors and to facilitate collective bargaining following restructuring in the public sector and to make certain amendments to the Employment Standards Act and the Pay Equity Act / Projet de loi 136, Loi prévoyant le règlement rapide des différends lors des négociations collectives dans certains secteurs, facilitant les négociations collectives à la suite de la restructuration dans le secteur public et apportant certaines modifications à la Loi sur les normes d'emploi et à la Loi sur l'équité salariale.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I understand that all three House leaders have an agreement that the time will be split evenly among caucuses, if that is necessary.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): My concern is that this is time allocated. The vote is going to be at 5:45. If one of the parties doesn't use all their time, then you've got trouble, because the vote is at 5:45 and there would be a hiatus. I guess we'll just have to —

Interjection.

The Speaker: Hang on a sec. Obviously, if one of the parties doesn't use up their time, at that time I'm going to have to seek direction from all three caucuses. We'll assume it's split from now until 5:45.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to comment today on Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act. Bill 136 has undergone extensive and intense consultations and detailed examination during pub-

lic hearings by the standing committee on resources development.

I believe today we have a bill that addresses the concerns of all the stakeholders and meets the government's objectives in ensuring a smooth transition as municipalities, school boards and hospitals restructure to provide better and more efficient public services at a lower cost to taxpayers.

When our government introduced Bill 136, we had specific objectives in mind.

First, we wanted to make sure that all employees, both unionized and non-unionized, were dealt with fairly in such matters as seniority and union representation during amalgamations and mergers in the municipal, school board and hospital sectors.

Second, we had to ensure a smooth transition during the restructurings and minimize the disruption of important and necessary public services.

Third, we needed to provide employers and employees with the tools and processes they need to deal with labour relations issues in a fair and expeditious manner.

Fourth, we wanted to address long-standing problems in the interest arbitration system in the police, fire and hospital sectors, where strikes are not permitted.

Fifth, we had to ensure that all our reforms would continue to encourage effective collective bargaining and locally negotiated solutions.

With Bill 136, we have succeeded in meeting our objectives. It's no surprise to anyone that the labour movement had several concerns with the initial form of the bill and specifically asked us to amend it in three ways. The first way they asked us to amend it was to remove some of the bill's new restrictions on some employees' right to strike. The second reform they asked for was to replace the Labour Relations Transition Commission with the Ontario Labour Relations Board. The third change they asked for was that we replace the Dispute Resolution Commission with a first-contract arbitration regime that was initially brought in by the Liberal-NDP government in 1986 and to restore a modified arbitration system for the non-right-to-strike sectors.

We listened to them and we did all three of these. We made all three of these changes, and we did so without losing sight of the bill's original objectives.

With the passage of this bill, employers, employees and unions in the broader public sector will have in place processes they need to resolve complex labour relations issues that are expected during the restructurings, while protecting the rights of all employees, unionized and non-unionized.

The Ontario Labour Relations Board will have new temporary powers to deal expeditiously and fairly with transitional issues, such as the makeup of bargaining units, which bargaining agent would represent the employees in the new workplace, seniority and first-contract negotiations. Over the years, the Ontario Labour Relations Board has earned the trust and respect of both employers and unions. By assigning these temporary powers to the board, we have removed the uncertainty that all the parties had in regard to the resolution of labour issues during the restructuring of our public services.

Bill 136 will also amend the existing arbitration systems set out in the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, the Police Services Act, the Public Service Act and the Hospital Labour Dispute Arbitration Act, which deal with collective bargaining in the police, fire and hospital sectors, where strikes are not permitted.

Almost half of all employees in the broader public sector currently do not have the right to strike. This includes some 25,000 police officers in local forces and the Ontario Provincial Police, nearly 10,000 full-time firefighters and 192,000 workers in hospitals and nursing homes.

For years there have been criticisms over the existing system, criticisms that Bill 136 will address. Delays were commonplace. In the hospital sector, for one, it was averaging almost two years to finalize a collective agreement. We heard testimony during the public hearings that, after 11 years in one case, hospital mergers still had not been settled. In another case it was four years and still counting. Bill 136 will help ensure we don't have the slow, legalistic and costly nature of the current interest arbitration system. Bill 136 will also help overcome the problem of widespread reliance on arbitration to resolve collective bargaining disputes, and the fact that arbitrators frequently didn't take the taxpayers' ability to pay into account when making an award.

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With Bill 136 expedited arbitration procedures and other processes which encourage negotiated settlements will be introduced in order to deal with the extensive time delays in the current system. These procedures will include mediation, mediation arbitration and final offer selection. There will be new expedited time lines to ensure prompt resolution of collective agreements. Employees and employers will not have to wait for up to two years, as currently may happen, to find out what kind of contract they have been working under. Most important, there will be criteria in place to ensure accountability to taxpayers.

We believe Bill 136 is a win-win-win situation for all the people of Ontario. The bill ensures that the transition to improved, rationalized public services delivery will be smooth, with minimal disruption of services. Employers will have the tools they need to manage change as restructuring occurs. All employees, unionized and non-unionized, will be treated fairly and will be able to exercise their democratic rights in the workplace.

Unlike the previous government's social contract, which overrode collective bargaining, under Bill 136 collective bargaining will remain the primary tool to resolve labour relations issues. Most importantly, the people of Ontario, the taxpayers of Ontario will benefit from the improved delivery of the public services they need at an affordable price. That is why I am pleased to support Bill 136.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): The member for Durham — is the time split? Rotation? Member for Windsor-Walkerville.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity —

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): No, this isn't right.

Mr David Turnbull (York Mills): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It had been my suggestion to the opposition parties that we would take a limited period of time for the government's debate on this issue. Then the remaining time, which would be more than two thirds of the total time, would be divided equally between the two opposition parties.

We're still agreeable to that, but in light of the discussion and the questions which were addressed to the Speaker, it would suggest there was some kind of tactic being used here — so long as we understand there's an agreement that we take a smaller amount of time and then the time is equally — perhaps you would like to seek unanimous consent on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreeable? Agreed?

Mr Christopherson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Just further to that, I think what caused the confusion was going into rotation. We have no problem with what the government whip has suggested, but just to put a fine point to it, you would use up all the time on whatever number of speakers you have. Then when that time is concluded, it would be split between the two oppositions and then we'd bounce back and forth. You'd use it up and then we'd use it up. That's my understanding of what we agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: If I understood you well, you will use your full time, correct? No?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): They use whatever time they can.

The Deputy Speaker: Whatever time you have. Then on this side, you'll stretch your time. Agreeable?

Mr Christopherson: At 5:45 we vote; it's now almost 3:15. The government's had one speaker; I understand they have one more. Then whatever time is left between the conclusion of their second speaker and 5:45 will be split 50-50 between the two opposition parties.

The Deputy Speaker: Fine. Member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Centre): I see I'm not the only one having trouble with the rules today in the House.

It's my pleasure to join the third reading debate on Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act, 1997. I had the opportunity to sit on the resources development committee that had public hearings that were held here at Queen's Park but listened to people right across the province of Ontario, because it was an opportunity to use videoconferencing to listen to people. We heard people from as far away as Owen Sound, Thunder Bay, right across Ontario —

Interjection.

Mr Newman: Kincardine — all sorts of wonderful places in Ontario, to get input on Bill 136.

I think that special note ought to go to the member for Guelph, the Chair of the resources development committee, Brenda Elliott, who did an outstanding job of chairing those hearings. I think it's important to note that even the member for Hamilton Centre appreciated the fine job you did and how you were fair in listening to the many people who came forward, who were not only in favour of Bill 136 but those who were opposed to Bill 136. I think you ought to be commended for that.

Likewise, Jerry Ouellette, the MPP for Oshawa, who is the Vice-Chair of the resources development committee, deserves a big round of applause for his fine work in that, as does the parliamentary assistant, the member for Niagara Falls, Bart Maves, who did an excellent job of bringing that bill through the resources development committee. The bill is all about dealing with change, change during restructuring of hospitals, municipalities and the school boards. Bill 136 was all about bringing the tools forward that people needed to manage that change.

Of all the presentations that were made to the resources development committee, one of the ones that stood out in my mind was the presentation from the Ontario Hospital Association, which used some examples which helped me a great deal in understanding this bill and the consequences of not having a bill like Bill 136 in place.

They used an example of the merger of the Hamilton Civic Hospital and the Chedoke-McMaster Hospital in November 1996. During this merger, the Canadian Union of Public Employees made clear its position that through any of the jobs that were going to be available, their union members ought to have first right at those jobs. I think what was missing in that was the fact that people who weren't members of the union were going to be bypassed for those jobs.

A second example they used which hit home here in Toronto was the merger of the Toronto General Hospital and the Toronto Western Hospital in 1986, over 11 years ago. Imagine, 11 years ago, and in all that time there are still problems in dealing with the unions that deal with carpenters, for example. There are two separate groups, one at Toronto Western and one at Toronto General. What they said during the Bill 136 hearings was that if there was a carpenter needed at Toronto Western, they couldn't bring a carpenter from the Toronto General site 11 years later. That's a shame and that takes money away from front-line patient care. That's something I just cannot stand for, and I know that members on the government side think that's just a waste of money when there are capable people sitting at another site of the same entity not being able to help in that case. We think that's just a waste of money.

We also in Bill 136 listened to what the union leadership had to say. They said clearly to us, "Don't take away the right to strike," and we listened. We didn't take away that right to strike. I think the Minister of Labour ought to be commended for the fine job she did in listening and dialoguing with various groups, the parties that were affected by Bill 136. We did not take away the right to strike.

People also told us right across the province — they said it in my riding of Scarborough Centre — "Please do away with the Dispute Resolution Commission," so we

did. The powers that would have been entrusted to the Dispute Resolution Commission were given to the Ontario Labour Relations Board, as were the powers of the Labour Relations Transition Commission. Those powers were given to the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

1520

These were issues right across the province, whether it be here at Queen's Park during the public hearings or in our own ridings or via videoconferencing when we heard people from across the province speak. They wanted those powers given to the Ontario Labour Relations Board and we listened because we wanted to see a smooth and orderly transition with minimal disruption in public service. We all have a responsibility to our constituents to ensure that happens during this restructuring.

Several other parts of Bill 136 dealt with union representation in terms of who would represent the 450,000 workers who are represented by over 3,300 different bargaining units across the province. Bill 136 originally established very specific numeric thresholds which the Labour Relations Transition Commission would have used to decide bargaining agent issues resulting from restructuring where the trade unions were unable to resolve these issues themselves. Under the changes in Bill 136, if the trade unions are unable to agree themselves on who the bargaining agents should be, the threshold originally set out in Bill 136 will be replaced with a requirement that the Ontario Labour Relations Board conduct secret ballot votes when decisions are required in all of these particular decisions.

I think that's very democratic and I think it's something everyone in this Legislature would be in favour of. I'm not sure if they are, but I know we on the government side are in favour of secret votes.

An additional change to the way in which Bill 136 will determine which union will represent employees is the requirement that where restructuring includes former Ontario public service employees who are represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union or other union or association, OPSEU or the other union or association name will appear on the ballot when a vote is conducted on representation issues. Consultations with employee representatives have also resulted in changes to Bill 136 which, where appropriate, will allow employers and unions to retain specialized bargaining units for professional staff such as nurses. That's something I think is very important in this bill.

We also heard from police officers, from firefighters, from the Ontario Nurses' Association and other hospital workers. They were letting us know what their views were on Bill 136, and although the Labour Relations Transition Commission functions and responsibilities are being transferred to the Ontario Labour Relations Board, I think it's important to keep in mind that the vast majority of transitional provisions in the bill will remain, such as the determination of effective and rationalized bargaining unit structures appropriate for the new employers' operations. We think that's fair for the people of Ontario.

The determination of successful bargaining agents by secret ballot, which I mentioned before, and the elimination of provisions which would have allowed a union with a substantial majority of members in the bargaining unit to be designated the agent for the whole unit without a vote — imagine having representation without a vote. What Bill 136 does is allow for that secret ballot. I think that's key.

The seniority rules that ensure non-union employees are protected in the amalgamation process: We have had many examples in all the sectors, in the hospital sector, in the municipal sector and in the school board sector, where some employees may not be unionized and they'll be merging with other employees who are unionized. It's only fair that the seniority rules be in effect for those non-unionized workers.

The concept of composite or staple collective agreements remains to bring stability during negotiation of the first post-amalgamation agreement where necessary. Employers and unions involved in amalgamations are provided with the opportunity to reopen their collective agreements and bargain new first post-amalgamation contracts. I believe that is fair, and that has come from listening to the people of Ontario. From the Minister of Labour, through the parliamentary assistant as well, and through the committee process we heard that these are items that are wanted. In fact, if we look at the public galleries today, here we are in third reading of Bill 136, we have listened, and from what I can see the galleries before me are not filled with people opposing Bill 136, so it's indeed encouraging to know we have a bill that works here.

Bill 136 also deals with the interest arbitration reforms in the police, fire and hospital sectors where the right to strike and lockout currently does not exist. Some have said that the problems with the current interest arbitration system include the widespread reliance on arbitration to resolve collective bargaining disputes rather than on negotiation of settlements by the parties themselves, and also the very slow, legalistic and costly nature of the current interest arbitration system, where settlements are often not arbitrated until months after the previous collective agreement has expired and where interest arbitration awards often do not reflect the economic and fiscal reality of public sector employers.

You may ask, how does Bill 136 change this, how does it fix the problem? It's with the Bill 136 changes to the Fire Prevention and Protection Act, the Police Services Act, the Hospital Labour Dispute Arbitration Act and the Public Service Act to create expedited time lines to ensure the quick and timely resolution of disputes in the police, fire and hospital sectors.

The bill also fixes these problems by continuing, with the changes in Bill 136, to provide arbitrators with a much wider range of tools to deal with collective bargaining disputes in the police, fire and hospital sectors. These tools include mediation, arbitration and final offer selection during the arbitration process. Bill 136 also fixes the problem by continuing to require arbitrators to consider

various criteria such as the public sector employer's ability to pay, because after all it's the taxpayers of Ontario who pay for this, and the extent to which services would have been reduced if funding and taxation levels were to have remained unchanged.

We also dealt in the bill with the removal of the Dispute Resolution Commission. When the minister spoke before the committee, she said that with the elimination of the Dispute Resolution Commission, the employers and unions would now have access to section 43 of the first-contract provisions of the Labour Relations Act. I quote her:

"Section 43 of the Labour Relations Act was enacted in 1986 at the request of the unions, and it was part of the Peterson-Rae accord. Under this section of the Labour Relations Act, if after negotiations the employer and union have been unable to reach a new first collective agreement, either party may apply to the Ontario Labour Relations Board."

Also during the hearings, we spoke about adequate funding in health care. I spoke at length about the reinvestments in health care in this province, and I will speak again about the reinvestments in health care, because it deals with adequate funding of the system.

If I was to go on to mention each and every reinvestment in health care that this government has brought forward since June 1995, we would be here until well past midnight, and I wouldn't be able to finish, but I'll be very selective and mention a few of the reinvestments.

These are reinvestments right across the province. For example, in Sudbury, $70.2 million was given to the Sudbury area for its health care services restructuring; capital for the Timmins Children's Treatment Centre, $1.4 million; capital reinvestment in northwestern Ontario, $21.1 million for the towns of Dryden, Emo, Marathon, Rainy River and the Red Lake project.

We never hear the opposition mentioning those reinvestments. Those are all in opposition ridings and I don't hear them talking in the House about those reinvestments, reinvestments that have included places like London, Ontario, where the health services were expanded by the addition of $133 million in capital for hospital restructuring; the capital reinvestment in the Grey-Owen Lodge in Markdale, $3.35 million for a 66-bed facility in September of this year; capital for the Greenwood Court Nursing Home in Stratford, $750,000.

1530

Mr Bradley: Is this on topic?

Mr Newman: It is on topic because we're talking about adequate funding of the health care system.

On that note, we are spending, as the Deputy Premier mentioned again today, $18.5 billion on health care in this province. The Common Sense Revolution originally said $17.4 billion. If we look at the Liberal red book, they promised $17 billion. So we're spending $1.5 billion more on health care in this province, which is adequate, in spite of the federal government's cuts to health care, I might add.

Some more reinvestments: capital for the Burlington nursing homes, $2.1 million to expand two homes, and that was in September of this year; capital for the Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care in Toronto, $18.9 million for the 372-bed centre and a 100-bed centre for cognitive disorders; reinvestment in hospital services in Barrie, $7.5 million. The residents of long-term-care facilities are going to receive more care. Why? Because we've reinvested $100 million annually: $70 million for nursing, $20 million for dietary, housekeeping and maintenance, and $10 million for programming. It's important to note that this will create 2,250 new jobs in the health care sector in this province.

A reinvestment in cancer care and the creation of Cancer Care Ontario, $16.5 million for new drugs and for children and women with cancer, and that was in April of this year; the neurotrauma initiative, $25 million over the next five years, and that was in dealing with the Rick Hansen Man in Motion tour; the preschool speech-language therapy program, $20 million to double the number of children served, and that was done in April of this year; the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, something I think we can all support in this House, $10 million; the Better Beginnings, Better Futures program, an ongoing commitment of $4.6 million; the Invest in Kids grant, $10 million for abuse prevention and early intervention programs; capital funding for Villa Marconi in Ottawa, $2.4 million, again in April of this year; the eating disorders reinvestment, $1.5 million to benefit 2,000 people and that was part of the $83-million hospital health care renewal; the capital to renovate and redevelop Guelph hospitals which I know the members from Wellington and Guelph will be quite pleased to see, $67.7 million reinvested into health care in their communities.

There was a reinvestment I had the opportunity to make myself in Moosonee for the James Bay General Hospital. I know the member for Cochrane North appreciated that reinvestment in his riding. He's shaking his head yes because he knows we're reinvesting health care dollars right back into the system and every single riding in this province is benefiting. They're all benefiting from the health care restructuring that's going on as part of this government.

The hospital reinvestments for health care renewal, $83 million in total: $35 million for cardiac care, $18 million for mental health, $11 million for dialysis and kidney transplants, $8 million for cancer, $5 million for transplants, $3 million for trauma services, $3 million for hip and knee replacements.

Capital reinvestment in long-term care and community health: $29.1 million for Metro Toronto and York region, including $11.4 million and 160 new beds for long-term care and $17.7 million for four CHCs. That was in March of this year.

The long-term-care reinvestment: $170 million and that would provide services for 80,000 people in this province and creates 4,400 front-line jobs, including $21.5 million here in Toronto.

The reinvestment in community services in Thunder Bay — we hear Thunder Bay mentioned a great deal in the House in terms of health care. I think it's important to know that $7.67 million was reinvested back into community services in Thunder Bay and that includes $2.4 million for home care, $2.3 million for transitional care, $1.4 million for a new building for the CMHA, $1.2 million for mental health services for adolescents and repatriating two local residents receiving treatment for acquired brain injuries in the United States, for bringing patients back home, and that's important to families.

The reinvestment for hospitals in high-growth areas for 1997, $18 million plus $25 million renewed for the GTA, and northern Ontario hospital, $14 million. The Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital long-term-care services capital, $1.95 million, almost $2 million for 57 new beds in that community. The Dufferin-Caledon-Shelburne chronic care capital initiative, $1 million for renovations of 26 beds.

We're seeing that there's adequate funding in the system, that all the reinvestments are coming back right into the community and driving out the waste and duplication, and this is very important.

We also had in 1996, again in Thunder Bay, the Thunder Bay hospital and health services renewal, $59.4 million, and it includes new space for the regional hospital, the Port Arthur site, St Joseph's General Hospital, a new forensic psychiatric unit and $1 million for an MRI; the breast cancer screening, a $24.3 million reinvestment and that's very important.

I was able to do the announcement in Bracebridge along with the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay this summer and the people in that community appreciated that reinvestment and we're quite pleased to see that the government is driving the waste and duplication right out of the system.

Funding was confirmed for the Windsor Cancer Centre — again we hear Windsor mentioned in this House many times — $18.9 million. You'd think when you listen to opposition members here in the House — I see the member for Windsor-Walkerville is applauding to see that these reinvestments are happening.

There was funding for the Huron Lodge construction in Elliot Lake, $3.2 million; the hepatitis B immunization for teens, a one-year expansion was announced last year. The expanded diabetes care, a reinvestment of $5.8 million; cardiac stents, $2 million for one-time funding. That was done in September 1996.

We introduced community-sponsored contracts, $6.7 million for 21 northern communities. I know they've worked quite well. In my travels in northern Ontario I've talked to people and they're quite pleased by this. The community investment fund, $23.5 million for mental health and that included $2.9 million for Metro and Peel and $1.8 million for Hamilton, Halton and Brant.

Another reinvestment was the magnetic resonance imaging machines, the MRIs, that have been going in across this province. When all of the MRIs this government has announced are put into place, we'll have more MRIs than the rest of Canada combined. I had the pleasure of opening the MRI in Newmarket recently and to see where three hospitals, York County, York Central and Markham-Stouffville, all worked together to have the MRI in one site and they share that one, single machine.

Also one Saturday morning I had the opportunity to fly to Timmins to open the MRI in Timmins and to see the positive impact the MRI in Timmins will have for that community and the people in northeastern Ontario; no more flights to Toronto for an MRI for the people of northeastern Ontario. It's positive for the people of Moosonee, the people of Timmins, all the people of northeastern Ontario. These are positive moves, that people don't have to take time away from jobs. They're able to go to Timmins, to their part of the province, to get that care. That's something that's very important.

More funding to treat problem gamblers, $1.1 million allocated annually in the 1996 budget; funding for high-growth area hospitals for 1996, $25 million; the Windsor restructuring, $48.2 million announced in March 1996; the Chapleau capital renovations and long-term-care facility, $4.82 million for the people of Chapleau.

As I'm going on about the reinvestments, they're right across the province. Everyone is seeing the positive changes in health care.

The eating disorders program, $126,550 reinvested in February 1996. There were expanded emergency services announced in 1995, $4.4 million. There was the cardiac surgery reinvestment of up to $16 million announced in December 1995 and the $2.5 million one-time funding announcement. There was the two-dose measles immunization program, $4.5 million announced in December 1995. We've introduced a $70-per-hour sessional fee. That's $13 million for emergency room services in small, rural hospitals.

1540

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): That sure helps our community.

Mr Newman: The member for Brant-Haldimand says that it helps his community. It's funny, as I sit here and go through all the reinvestment, and it's all tied to adequate funding, that members of the opposition are listening and they realize that these reinvestments are happening right in their own communities. Usually when I'm up here speaking they're heckling, they don't want to listen, but they know that these are real dollars that have been reinvested in their community.

The expansion of the Trillium drug program, $45 million.

The expanded kidney dialysis services province-wide, $25 million. I know that in my community of Scarborough we now have a regional dialysis centre at Scarborough General Hospital. The member for Scarborough East, the member for Scarborough-Ellesmere, the members for Scarborough West, Scarborough-Agincourt, Scarborough North and myself, as the member for Scarborough Centre, know the benefit that means to our community. It means that people no longer have to drive from Scarborough to downtown Toronto. I might add that with more people

who have jobs, the traffic is more and more becoming a role, and it's important that people receive that care right in their own community. They know that they can go to Scarborough General Hospital, get the dialysis they need and be able to go back to their jobs or back to their families and not have to worry about driving downtown with the increased number of vehicles that are on the roads. I might add they are new vehicles, because more people, because they're working, are buying new vehicles.

Those are just some of the reinvestments. I didn't touch on all of them but I just touched on a few of them. There are more. In fact, if you look at the reinvestments —

Mr Bradley: Routine expenditures. Happens all the time.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for St Catharines.

Mr Newman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Again, $1 million for funding for long-term care facilities; $170 million for long-term community based services; $43 million for hospital growth; $14 million for northern hospital growth; $25 million for hospital growth in 1996; $18 million for cardiac surgery and stents; $25 million for expanded kidney dialysis service; $5.8 million for diabetes expansion; $133 million for London restructuring; $70.2 million for Sudbury restructuring; $59.4 million for the Thunder Bay restructuring; $7.67 million for Thunder Bay community services; $48.2 million for Windsor restructuring; $18.9 million for Windsor cancer care; $13 million for emergency physician sessional fees.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): It sounds like each and every dollar is all invested back into the health care system.

Mr Newman: The member for Scarborough East says it sounds like each and every dollar has been reinvested back into the health care system. I say yes. In fact, I say every single penny has been reinvested back into the health care system.

Some $6.7 million for northern community contracts; $45 million for Trillium drug program expansion; $23.5 million for the community investment fund; $12 million for acquired brain injury repatriation; $4.4 million for defibrillation and symptom relief; $15.5 million for OPALS paramedic training; $2 million for viral load testing; $24.3 million for breast screening; $6.2 million for Taxol for breast cancer; $20 million for speech-language therapy; $10 million for the healthy babies program; $4.6 million for Better Beginnings, Better Futures; $10 million for Invest in Kids; $20 milliion for pneumococcal vaccination for seniors; $4.5 million for measles immunization; $126,000 for the eating disorders program.

There's $1 million again for problem gambling; $45.4 million to recruit doctors for underserviced areas; $1.85 million for a northern and rural research unit; $150,000 for the northern teaching program relocation; $194,000 for Timmins psychiatrists; $150,000 for a northeastern community development officer; $122,000 for the rural medicine program; $2.75 million for the nursing database and outcomes research unit; $1 million for chronic care capital; $15.05 million for long-term-care capital; $2.5 million for additional cardiac services; $83 million for the renewal of hospital services; $29.1 million for capital for long-term care and community hospitals in Metro and York; $67.7 million capital for redeveloping hospitals in the Guelph area; $2.4 million capital for Villa Marconi in Ottawa; $21.1 million capital for northwestern Ontario.

Mr Duncan: You said that already.

Mr Newman: I'm just re-emphasizing, I say to the member for Windsor-Walkerville, the reinvestments. I go on and on: capital for the Baycrest Geriatric Centre, $18.9 million. But when you total up these amounts, over $1.3 billion was reinvested that was found in waste and duplication within the system, reinvested right back into the system so that patients in every one of our ridings can benefit from that care.

We're seeing that we do have an adequate amount of funding in the system for health care. It's all tied to Bill 136, because Bill 136 is about restructuring in the municipalities, in the hospital sector. I think in listening to people on Bill 136, as the parliamentary assistant did, the minister, all members of the government caucus who went out and listened to our constituents, listened to the union locals in their area, we found that in the end everyone wants a smooth and orderly transition through the amalgamations and mergers, and Bill 136 does this.

We don't want to see any repeats of the fiasco that's there at the Toronto Hospital today after the restructuring of 11 years ago. Imagine the problems that would exist if we didn't have a bill like Bill 136 in place to manage the change. How many times more would that be multiplied across this province and how many more dollars would get away from front-line patient services and just be caught up in waste and duplication? That's not something that I stand for. I personally stand for ensuring that all those reinvested dollars go right back into the system. That's why, when we vote on Bill 136, I will be supporting that bill.

Mr Duncan: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 136 today on behalf of my party and our caucus. I watched with great interest the statement made by the member for Scarborough Centre and listened attentively as he spoke about the issues of the day. I found it quite remarkable coming from that government — I remember a government that said, "We won't use taxpayers' moneys to buy their votes." We're seeing a much different government. We're seeing a government that's hearing the noise out there, and I think the reason he didn't spend much time on Bill 136 is because it represents for the government perhaps one of its largest embarrassments, one of its largest retreats, one of the best examples of how to govern wrong, how not to provide for proper public policy, how not to debate the issues of the day.

Let's remember the time frames: June 3 the bill is introduced, a bill that takes away the right to free collective bargaining of public employees, a bill as draconian as any we have seen from this government, though there are a lot of them that one could only term draconian.

They talked tough. This all came from amalgamation; this all came from downloading which will raise property

taxes across this province. They talked tough all summer and then the heat got turned on and they backed down. They said, "Ignore everything we said in June." I don't know how we could actually even proceed with this bill. The 150 amendments changed the complexion of the bill, and even in spite of all those amendments it is still a fatally flawed bill, a bill that we are proud to vote against.

I want to take a few minutes to explain why and to explain to people why we think the bill should not be passed. I want to talk for a couple of moments about the labour relations climate in Ontario.

This government has deliberately set on a course to provoke organized labour. This is a government that does not believe in the fundamental principles of free collective bargaining. This is a government that I believe some day will try to take away something as basic as the Rand formula.

1550

Let's be clear that those of us on this side of the House will oppose it at every step of the way. What do we have as a result of two years of this policy, this type of intimidation, this type of not recognizing the realities of collective bargaining, the reality that working people need a voice, not only in this Legislature but in their workplaces and in their communities? What do we have? We have an unstable labour market. We have a labour market that doesn't function the way it ought to. What we saw in September of this year on Bill 136 was a full retreat by the government, a retreat that was criticized by some of their own friends.

The member from Scarborough talked about amalgamations and the importance of dealing with things. I couldn't agree more. However, I do want to set the record straight on a few matters. He talked about the so-called reinvestments they're making in health care. I can't speak with respect to a lot of the ones he dealt with, but I can address the ones he dealt with in my community.

He dealt with the cancer centre. He talked about $18.6 million. What he neglected to say was that was promised and budgeted for two and a half years ago — no new money. Go to your press clippings. It was announced by the previous government, and then this government quite properly, when it came to office, wanted to review the announcement. Then they reannounced it. So it's not new money; it's not money coming from the closing of our hospitals. It's money that was already there. It's being repackaged to try and buy votes, but it's too late to buy votes. The jury's in on this government, and they're hearing the footsteps. That's why they're playing the old pork barrel games. That's why they're trying to convince people that they're spending and investing.

The member spoke of our hospital situation, the $42 million in capital that has been committed to Windsor's restructuring initiatives. If it wasn't so serious, one could laugh at including that in such a list. The member just conveniently forgot to tell the House that our local restructuring commission recommended a capital investment of $109 million in order to accommodate the closure of our two hospitals and leave us with two centres of excellence. I'll remind members that we have already gone through that process. We have closed two hospitals, for all intents and purposes. The member forgot to mention that little fact. The member forgot to mention the fact that the $42 million was announced before the cuts that you've made in health care everywhere else.

I say to those members on the government back benches who applaud and clap and do what they're told, start speaking for your communities. Don't let the government take these things and twist them around so they can be used to buy people's votes because, my friends opposite, people won't be taken in by that. Last week we had the heads of our emergency room in one of our hospitals quit. Why? Because you haven't fulfilled your commitment. There hasn't been one dollar flow. So as of December 31 in our emergency rooms, the government that's reinvesting, creating quality health care — the money hasn't come. It's not there, and the money promised was promised in previous budgets.

I say to the government members, stand up for your communities. Don't listen to that drivel, that repackaging of money that's being spent elsewhere. I suspect the conscientious members on the government side know that. They're getting the calls, just as we are, from their communities and from our own. They understand that message. They will continue to try to repackage these things, but as long as health care is in the state it's in in this province, nobody will believe you, especially when you distort the facts.

When you suggest that somehow there is a new $18 million for a cancer centre in Windsor, you're blowing smoke. It was announced two years ago and budgeted for two years ago — no new money. By the way, ground hasn't been broken. So don't play those games and don't try to convince the people that you're doing something for them when you know you're not. Fundamentally, they'll see through that.

They'll see through any attempt to try and camouflage what your message is. Your message is to shut down working people. Your message is to close hospitals. Your message is to harm education. Why? So you can give a tax break to your wealthy friends, $5 billion in forgone revenue. Why? Because you bit off more than you could chew, just like you did in this bill.

We're voting against it. We spoke against it in its first incarnation and we're going to vote and speak against this bill today. Why? The first reason, as I said, is the labour climate in this province today. There are always going to be difficult negotiations between governments and their employees and their employees' representatives. There will be difficult negotiations in the private sector. But fundamentally in this province we have a history of respecting that organized workers should have a voice at the table, that employers should have a voice at the table and that together we can resolve difficulties.

I was pleased to see the 150 amendments tabled by the government, even though they still haven't dealt with the question of the employee wage protection program. Ultimately, this bill does away with that and harms pay

equity. But what upsets me is, what took them so long? Why did we have to wait until September 29 for them to back down? They could have avoided all this. They could have avoided the fear, the unnecessary confrontation.

I believe they didn't because they, in their minds, believe that labour is an enemy, that organized labour is not well regarded. What they found out, what they've discovered this summer — it's like a conversion on the road to Damascus — is that public opinion simply doesn't agree with them. Oh, yes, we may not agree on every issue with organized labour. We may not like a position on particular contract negotiations, but fundamentally the people of this province know and understand that our quality of life, the basic wage and benefit protections that we have and many of the statutory protections we have are the result of organized labour, of working men and women bargaining freely to improve our standard of living, our quality of life in this great province.

When the Premier told us that he had accepted the compromises proposed by our nurses, our police officers, firemen and other public sector workers, I had to chuckle, because he wouldn't meet with them face to face. He had to come in here and give a relatively stinging statement in the Legislature trying to camouflage full retreat.

I think we've seen the best example yet of what happens when governments try to go too far, too fast. Those are words the government members know. They know that. The backbenchers know that. They're hearing the same message. It's in our phone calls at the constituency offices, it's in the surveys that are done by polling organizations. Even among the people who support the government, many of them say they're going too far, too fast.

What do we have here today? A perfect example. You brought in your downloading in January, your mega-week announcements, what I call the mega property tax increases, the shifts of power and balance between the municipalities of this province and the province itself; brought forward and introduced with no consultation with the affected parties, brought forward ignoring the recommendations of the government's own task force, brought forward without legislation, brought forward without involving your own public servants in discussing how you're going to implement all of these remarkable changes, all of these changes that are going to raise property taxes on every homeowner in this province. Why? So you could give your rich friends a big income tax cut; so you could give it to all of your friends.

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I guess we really shouldn't have been surprised when the government retreated on 136, because on so many other parts of the mega-week announcements they retreated as well. What we had in January was far different from what we have today, and I'll predict right here and now that it will be far different than ultimately what will happen and what will evolve in this province. The government will spend the last year and a half of its mandate attempting to clean up the mess they've created between municipalities and the province.

Bill 136 was conceived, was the result of the government's desire to amalgamate municipalities and find efficiencies. We in the official opposition believe that when you deal with these amalgamations, when you deal with trying to improve efficiencies, working people, through their duly elected representatives, ought to be able to participate. Through negotiations, they ought to be able to bargain freely. We believe right to our core that those free negotiations would have resulted in a process and an end result that would have been better than that which we started with. Now the government seems to have acknowledged that.

The working men and women of this province care every bit as much as anyone else about the wellbeing of our province and its communities. Whether they are CAW members, CUPE members or OPSEU members, they are not an enemy. They are a partner and ought to be considered a partner. The big, bad, tough government that was going to take away their rights to bargain — well, you backed down. You all backed down. You couldn't sustain it. People began to see through you, and that's what this bill is about.

I want to take one moment to talk about the process surrounding this bill a little bit more. There was absolutely no consultation with any of the affected parties prior to the introduction of the bill in June. There were no face-to-face discussions with the unions representing the workers until September. Then the government announced its plans to gut the legislation and they provided no details — no amendments, no nothing.

Then we had only four days of public hearings on this particular bill. There were no hearings outside of Toronto. We did videoconferencing, which was thrown together at the last minute. It wasn't well thought out. The hearings ended on Friday at 5 o'clock. We had to have our amendments in by Monday at 10. Then we got 250 pages of amendments at 10 o'clock and had to vote on them by 3:30. What a joke. What an absolute joke.

When I hear government members talk about their desire to listen to people, to get input, it's a sham, a complete sham. The committee hearings were a waste of time, as they have been on so many other occasions. The government members dutifully come in, dutifully do what they're told, not even having read the amendments.

This bill is a perfect example of what happens when you abuse, when you take advantage of the processes that we have evolved in this Legislature, in the Parliament of our country and indeed in the parliaments in the Commonwealth around the world. You get bad legislation. You get legislation that you have to retreat on. You get legislation that simply won't work.

We in the official opposition will vote against the bill because we think public policy ought to be conducted differently. We think it can be done better. We think working people have a role, have a responsibility in our communities to be part of it.

I think of the firefighters in my city, Windsor, who are in their stations tonight on duty, good men and women all, committed to their community. They give back to their

community. I think of the Windsor Police Association. These are the people this bill dealt with. You wanted to take away firefighters' ability to negotiate. You wanted to take away the rights our police officers have to negotiate with municipalities, even in a process where there's arbitration. That's what you wanted to do. I can tell you, the firefighters and police in my home community saw through you when this bill was introduced. They were fast off the mark. And they were the same in your communities.

I think of our firefighters at home and the great work they do, and the police, and this government centres them out. This government says: "Your rights are gone. We don't believe you should have those rights. Efficiency is more important." Well, having served on municipal council, I can tell you, the firefighters in Windsor and the police in Windsor have always worked with our community to ensure we have not only the best firefighting and police services but that those services are provided in a cost-effective and efficient manner, recognizing the important obligations they have to protect our communities, to put out fires and to save people.

Then you wanted to go after the public sector workers, the big, bad civil servants, the bureaucrats. I can tell you again that those public servants — and I use the words "public servants" because that's what they are. They serve us well and they serve our communities well. Those public servants in Windsor, in St Clair Beach, in Tecumseh, throughout Essex county and indeed throughout this province contribute enormously to their workplace and to their communities, and you wanted to take their rights away. You wanted to say to them, "You don't have a place."

In Windsor we're in the middle of our United Way campaign. For 26 years, we have had the highest per capita giving of any community in this country, and labour has led the way on that. It's labour in our city that mans the soup kitchens, staffs all kinds of volunteer organizations, organizes minor sports. These people that you've attacked are your neighbours. They give back to our communities.

Any government will from time to time have difficult negotiations around contract issues, will have to differ with those organizations. Sometimes those confrontations can be very unpleasant. But fundamentally we have to recognize their significant contribution, not only to governance but to our communities. You wanted to take away their rights. You weren't bashing unions, you were bashing people. You were bashing the clerks at city hall. You were bashing the firefighters. You were bashing the police. Why? Because you got yourself in too deep. You didn't plan your download. You ignored the advice that was given to you and instead, having been cornered, you proceeded with what can only be considered tomfoolery, and you so much as admitted that when you withdrew, for all intents and purposes, the bill.

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Thank goodness you did that. There have been too many occasions when you haven't withdrawn the bills, when you haven't done what you should have done. You should have had that $42 million in capital flow to Windsor before you closed the emergency rooms, not after, like the experts told you. But no, you couldn't, because you've made these crazy commitments that you're not going to keep ultimately. You've betrayed the very people who make our communities work and you've demonstrated absolutely no regard for their concerns or issues.

We have seen a remarkable backing down by this government on this piece of legislation. We've seen a full retreat. We see a government that understands and recognizes that it has gone too far, but you offended the police in your community, the firefighters, the public servants, in addition to the teachers.

What about the teachers, Bill 160? We talk about a labour relations climate. I have here today hundreds of letters that I just received this afternoon about labour relations once again. I know what you're thinking: "We'll get into a fight with those teachers and we'll win that one." You're wrong. You won't win it. You'll lose it, just like you lost on Bill 136, just like you're going to lose in two years.

Hundreds of letters — this one from C. Renaud, the principal at St Angela school. What do they say?

"I'm a teacher in Windsor and I don't want to go on strike. However, if through legislation you destroy not only the teaching professional but also the quality of publicly funded education, I will join my colleagues in a province-wide strike.

"Please reconsider your government's actions before you further damage the learning environment of the students entrusted to me."

Margaret Ferris at St Angela school; Daniel Fix at St Angela school; Stéphane Mitchell.

I've got letters from parents as well, and from students. Don't think the parents are going to back you in this. They won't. They're not going to be fooled any more on your education initiatives than they were by the nonsense the member from Scarborough tried to pass off as reinvestments in health care. Why? Because we go into our kids' schools in the morning. We see classrooms with 40 kids in them. We see classrooms that don't have computers. We see schools that aren't properly cleaned due to lack of funding, funding that you cut, funding that you'll be held accountable for. The people of this province will remember it as well as they'll remember your foolishness on Bill 136 and what you've done to the policemen, the firefighters, the public servants in our community.

I'm proud to vote against this bill. I'm proud to vote against that government, and in two years the rest of the province will cast judgement on your failed revolution, a revolution that's done nothing but harm to the people of this province.

Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): I have a few comments I'd like to make too about this legislation, Bill 136. The bill may threaten the rights of public sector employees across the province. It serves as an attack on the rights of municipal, hospital and school board employees.

Minister, there's been a large, loud public outcry. As I mentioned in this Legislature before, the city of Cornwall and the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry estimated their financial costs of the downloading by this government. The city of Cornwall and the united counties are predicting $18.85 million and $18.9 million respectively, and I don't know in an area of high unemployment where these dollars are going to come from to carry on the operations of those municipalities.

Minister, you're proceeding much too quickly across the province. We have to slow down and listen to the people. There's been a public outcry. Please slow down. Many Cornwall and area public sector workers and coworkers across the province join me in opposition to this bill. Cornwall and the communities across it are losing confidence in the government. They are not keeping their deadlines. They make promises when they're going to get information out to municipal councils and it's not happened.

The hospitals are worrying about the services, reducing services, and about many issues. I know that it had been mentioned a little bit earlier in the Legislature here today by the member for Scarborough Centre. I don't know whether he was trying to rub salt in the wound or not, but in my area, where we were promised dialysis on April 24, 1996, it has not happened yet. They can't get in contact with the minister's office to set up the meetings to understand where he is going. I wish he'd be a little bit more careful when he makes statements like that in the Legislature, because we're not all being used the same across Ontario.

I would hope the minister would step back and look at this bill. I know there have been several amendments, but I'm sure that the concerns are not all addressed.

I'd just like to take this opportunity to read a letter.

"As a constituent in your riding, I have had an opportunity to read Bill 136.... The legislation is unjustified and unfair.

"As a professional firefighter, I have taken an oath to uphold my association's constitution. Particularly, that portion which prohibits me from striking because as a firefighter I am required to protect the lives and property of the citizens of the community.

"Upon taking this oath, I believed that my bargaining rights and collective agreement would be protected by the current arbitration process, a process which is fair and unbiased.

"We need your support to maintain a fair and independent arbitration process for firefighters in Ontario."

It's signed by a senior fire prevention officer from the municipality that I represent.

I also have letters and resolutions from the city of Cornwall addressed to the Honourable Mrs Witmer. "The council of the corporation of the city of Cornwall, at its regular meeting on September 8, 1997, strongly endorsed a resolution in opposition to Bill 136. A copy of this motion is enclosed for your review." It's also moved, seconded and passed by the city of Cornwall.

We also get letters to the editor where they're complaining about Bill 136, how it will be unfair to the areas where they work.

The city of Cornwall has asked again and again to withdraw this Bill 136 and go back to the bargaining table and try to solve these problems peacefully and listen to the residents of Ontario.

Mr Bradley: I wish I could say I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill 136 on third reading, but unfortunately I wish the bill were not before this House even though the status of the bill and the content of the bill are substantially different from what they were when it started out.

Bill 136, members of the House will remember, was the bill introduced with a lot of fanfare by the government because it was going to put, as the Premier would call them, the union bosses in their places and was going to pander to that group of individuals in our society who do not like those who work in the public service. I'm very pleased to say that this is a very distinct minority of the people in the province, those who wish to bash anyone who might be working in the public service, but it does play well in some quarters. As a result, some of the more vociferous members of the government obviously wanted to push forward with this legislation which they believed would, as they would want, put the unions and the union bosses, as Premier Harris always refers to them, in their places.

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It backfired. Quite obviously, what happened is the same thing that's happening with teachers in the province. That is, the government is making militant people out of people who are not militants. If you talk to people in the public service, the average employee in the public service is not a militant person. That individual is not used to striking or taking other job action. It is rather rare to see strikes in the public service in our province — indeed, nationally as well — although there have been from time to time those strikes.

What the government found out was that the average person — I remember attending a meeting in Thorold of OPSEU workers. OPSEU had organized the school secretaries, for instance, in Niagara South. Now, if you looked at this group, this wasn't a militant group of people. These are people who want to go in and do their work and provide a valuable service within the school system. Yet they were moved to militancy that particular night at the plumbers hall in Thorold. They were people who were afraid at the time, afraid quite obviously that the government was going to proceed with Bill 136.

Across the province this crescendo began to build. It began to reverberate even in the back rooms of the government where all the decisions are made, in the Premier's office where the backroom boys get together with the Premier and suggest what should be done regardless of what the elected members of the Legislature believe. So they gathered there and found out that indeed there was a lot of support for the people in the public service.

So the Premier got up in quite a performance in this House. This was on September 18. I have the Hansard. It's a good thing I have the Hansard because the average person in Ontario, members of this House should know, can no longer have a subscription to the transcripts of the House; in other words, the Hansard. All the proceedings of the Ontario Legislature are contained within a printed Hansard. Since the very beginning, I believe, we've had this service available. For years and years and years, if a person had an interest in what happens in the Ontario Legislature — and everyone should because it affects everyone in our province — they could simply apply for a subscription, pay a certain amount of money and they could have a subscription to Hansard.

The Harris government has ended that. Now you have to own a computer and you have to have a certain network. You have to be, I believe, on the Internet. You have to have the access to it. The average person does not have that in their house. The rich people do. They have computers in the house and they're on the Internet and they have all of the software to go with it and all the hardware to go with it. That's how you get Hansard today.

Mr Preston: I've got a life instead.

Mr Bradley: I know that if my friend Mr Preston were not in this House, he would want a subscription to Hansard so he could be able to know what was happening in this House. Mike Harris and his fellow colleagues — but, to be fair, I don't blame the other members of the caucus — the Mike Harris group in the Premier's office said, "No longer shall people in this province be able to get a copy of this."

But I have a copy of it so I thought I would quote from the Premier. He got up on September 18 with all the bravado one expects from the Premier, all the bluster going. He was denouncing what he called the "union bosses." Let me just quote a few of the words the Premier used, because they were pretty strong words. He said, "I rise today to respond to some of the rhetoric I've heard in the past 24 hours from the union bosses." That sets the stage. Everyone's applauding. Many of the right-wing government members are applauding. They thought: "Here comes Mike. He's going to stand up to those union bosses."

He goes on to say, "This is very strong rhetoric and not, in my opinion, constructive or productive." He's talking about the union leadership. "While I do not agree with these tactics," says Mike Harris, "I understand that Mr Manners and Mr Ryan must get elected and that they believe they must engage in this type of rhetoric to appeal to their constituency." I think they might well want to apply that to the Premier, who is the person engaging in the rhetoric.

I want to be honest with members of the House. I thought the decision that was coming from the Premier was going to be this tough decision. "No backing down on Bill 136. We'll put those union bosses in their places," Mike Harris was saying. When he got finished with his statement, I thought, "Well, you know, we're going to have a major confrontation in this province."

Then I heard from the Minister of Labour. She got up right beside him and totally capitulated to the unions in the province, much to the chagrin of the right wing of the Tory caucus. There must have been a cardiac doctor on call because of the shock that would be felt in the government caucus at the Minister of Labour in full retreat, waving the white flag, sounding the bugles of retreat. You could hear the bugles sounding in the House as the government was retreating. If you want to bring it into the modern age, you could hear that beeping sound as the truck was backing up. They were in full retreat. Those backup lights were on as the government was in full retreat.

I couldn't believe it, I honestly couldn't believe it. Why? Because I'd heard Mike Harris just before that with all of his bravado. I've referred to him before as Phineas T. Bluster. Some members of the House, such as my friend Mr Brown from Scarborough, will remember Phineas T. Bluster in the television show Howdy Doody. Howdy Doody was a very pleasant individual. Phineas T. Bluster was always blustering. He was a cranky person. He was an angry person. But when it came right down to it, you know he didn't follow through.

We had a full retreat, or almost a full retreat, on Bill 136. The government brought in one of its — they call them "time allocation motions." They're really motions which choke off the debate. They choke off the debate because just as the Premier doesn't want people in the province to get Hansard easily, he doesn't want them to be able to hear a full and frank debate on the issues of the day. So what we had was a so-called time allocation motion that came forward.

I know there are members of the government caucus who believe the government is moving too quickly, too drastically and not looking at the consequences of its actions. I don't want to embarrass them, though I have them here. I would never embarrass my friends in the government caucus. I would never want to do that.

One of the members, though, from York East — I know he would want me to quote this — was quoted in the Toronto Sun as saying: "I've heard people suggest the pace is quick and I agree with them." Morley Kells, the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, said: "Once the government gets stuck with the high-speed label, it will be hard to peel off. I believe we should soften some of our approaches. We seem to do too much too quick."

Tony Skarica went on to say: "We are on a downward slide. We don't listen to the people who basically brought us to where we are, our core constituency. The police and firefighters and so forth are all every angry at us." These are Conservative members saying this. These are not Liberals, these are not New Democrats, these are Conservative members.

I don't happen to agree with the government agenda in many places, but even those who do agree — I have some friends who do agree. The member for Niagara Falls probably agrees. I have them agreeing, but they believe the government's moving too quickly and too drastically and not accepting the consequences of their actions.

That's a problem for the government. They're trying to slow down now. As I say, there was a sudden stop. They screeched to a stop and went into reverse, reversed engines. There was another old television show, called The Silent Service. It was about submarines and they would say, "Reverse engines." The government reversed its engines.

1630

It also passed the time allocation motion. Under the new provisions of the Legislature, under the new rules written by Mike Harris's people in his back room and those who want to please Mike Harris, they brought in these new rules.

When the government brought in new rules which were going to allow the government to grease the skids for its legislation, to ram everything through in record time, to have as little debate as possible, to eliminate any of the so-called bargaining chips the opposition might have to try to get more hearings, for instance, I thought when they imposed these new rules with the iron fist of the 82-member majority, that somehow they wouldn't have to use time allocation motions, but they did. They had to use those time allocation motions, and so on this they had a crazy time allocation motion which allowed very little time for debate on amendments.

We know that in this bill the pay equity situation is not yet resolved and the employee wage protection program has been abandoned. I know there are some people on the other side who didn't like that program, but there are a lot of people out there who had nowhere to turn. Do you know why they had nowhere to turn? Because you have cut back so much in the staff of the Ministry of Labour to deal with these issues where you have employers closing down and heading out of town and not paying the workers, leaving these workers behind. That program at least allowed for some compensation of those individuals, and the government has abandoned that program.

Now people phone the labour office in the St Catharines-Thorold area and they are told, "In eight months we'll be able to deal with your problem." Can you imagine waiting eight months to have a problem even dealt with, let alone resolved? Is that because the people in the labour office are mean-spirited? The answer is no. It is that they have too few employees in that office to be able to resolve these matters. Now you're leaving the poor workers out in the cold. These are not wealthy people who have bank accounts with millions upon millions of dollars; these are often people who live week to week, and they are in a very difficult situation.

I see the government tabled 150 amendments for the bill, basically to recognize that it was going to lose on this one. This was the retreat, and that was fine. Listen, I want to commend the government. You know how you think those of us in opposition never commend the government? I want to commend the government for capitulating to what it calls the union bosses. Mike Harris has done a good job in that case. He can quote me as saying that I agreed with him when he did his full capitulation to the trade union movement, because they were right and he was wrong, and so I agree with him on that.

But it took the government a long time to come up with its 150 amendments. If in the first place the government had negotiated in good faith, had sat down in good faith and discussed some changes when the transition took place in various sectors, I think they would have found a positive response. Instead they tried to impose it and that did not work. The bullying doesn't always work. It does sometimes; it doesn't always work.

The government waited until September 29 to formally back down from its strong-fisted legislation, and when the Premier told us he had accepted the compromises by Ontario's nurses, police officers, firefighters and other public sector workers, he didn't do it face to face with those people, as we know; he did it in a stinging statement in the Legislature. Can we expect the government to act the same way on Bill 160? Time will tell.

There was no meaningful consultation before June when Bill 136 was developed, no face-to-face discussions with workers until in September they announced a plan in the House to gut the legislation. There were no details of that. There were only four days of public hearings for people to make presentations and no hearings held outside Metropolitan Toronto.

There are some of us who recognize, though we love Metropolitan Toronto, that the world doesn't stop and start at the borders of Metropolitan Toronto, that there are people in Markham and Woodbridge and St Catharines and Hamilton and Ottawa and Kenora and all over the province who have an interest in what goes on here.

Did the government travel to those centres? No. It was afraid of the people in those centres, afraid to confront the individuals who were going to make presentations. What did they do? They had videoconferencing. With videoconferencing you don't have the people in the same room. They are far away and you can insult them if you want to on the other side and there's no way they can retort. Some people called that — I wouldn't do this — cowardice. I didn't think it was for a while, but I'm beginning to think they were right when they said that.

The hearings ended on Friday at 5 pm. Everybody had to have amendments in by Monday at 10 am. We got 250 pages of amendments at 10 am and had to vote on them by 3:30. That doesn't mean that the government is serious. That's process, and I know people outside of this place aren't as occupied with process as we are, but it doesn't mean that democracy functions well when you proceed in that fashion.

I hope the government listens in its discussions tomorrow with representatives of the teachers of this province. Just as I said I didn't think the other public sector workers were militants standing there waving their fists and wanting to go out on a province-wide strike, teachers don't want to either, but when you back people into a corner, when you take people on and you publicly denounce them and use it in a political way to get others to dislike one group in society, what do you expect?

I don't know whether you can win this battle — my colleague from Windsor-Walkerville says not and I suspect he's right — but even if you did, would it be worth it? Would it be worth the damage you do to people who work in the public sector, in this case the education sector? Yes, among some of your really right-wing friends you could say, "We showed them, didn't we?" but the best way to resolve these matters is the way successive governments such as Premier Robarts's and Premier Davis's would have solved them, and that is by bringing the people into a room and discussing things with them — not imposing things, not denouncing them with rhetoric, not trying to get others in society to dislike them so that the government would be on the side of right and those individuals on the side of wrong, but rather to sit down and have a meaningful discussion and try to develop a consensus.

I think that would be good for the province, and I think it would be good for the government, and most of all — this is most important — it would be good for the students in our system, and their parents and the teachers who work in that system. I hope that's what the government will do, because to this point I haven't seen that happen.

I have talked to people out there who I know are not militant. I have talked to people out there who normally wouldn't consider going out on strike unless for very definite and strong reasons, and they are saying to me they're being pushed to the edge of the precipice. I won't call it a retreat in this case, because it's a serious point we're at now. I hope the government looks carefully at its plan of action and that the government will try to find an accommodation with those who deliver educational services in the front line in our province, because they are the people who know the new challenges facing them.

The education system has changed since the 1950s. There are many people who would like to go back to the 1950s, and let me tell you there were some redeeming things about the 1950s in many ways, but that's not what it is today. Those are not the circumstances we face. We have far different students entering the system today than we had in those days. Today I hear people talk about the failure rate. What they fail to consider is that back in the 1950s and the early part of the 1960s, we had what was called grade 10 terminal, an awful-sounding name, but you were out the door, you couldn't go any further, and today more and more students are completing a high school education.

These are not always people who have a lot of academic ability. They may come from disadvantaged homes, but we are trying to provide an education for those individuals, so you can't expect that the scores are all of a sudden going to be very high, when you've got a greater number of people who find education to be a challenge staying in the system and trying to cope and trying to be successful.

1640

The hospital workers: I was pleased to have the Premier's letter arrive in the riding last Friday when I went to a press conference at Hotel Dieu Hospital, where they were announcing their 50th anniversary celebration. What you should know is that the local hospital closing commission — sorry, the local hospital restructuring commission — which has announced that there are five hospitals to be closed in the Niagara region, announced that Hotel Dieu would be one of the ones to close if their recommendations were accepted.

The Premier was there, large as life, in the form of his letter. Let me read what his letter had to say: "Please accept my best wishes for this year's celebrations and for the many more years to come." I'm going to hold the Premier to that, just as I'm going to hold him to his promise when he said in May 1995, in answer to Robert Fisher during the leadership debate during the provincial election, "I can guarantee you, Robert, it is not my plan to close hospitals." That was in response to a question which said, "With all the changes to health care you're going to bring about, Mike Harris, will hospitals close as a result?" The Premier said, "It is not my plan to close hospitals."

That's a surprise to the people who are supporting the five hospitals that are slated to close or be radically altered in the Niagara Peninsula. I'm going to remind people of that promise, and I hope the Premier keeps it. If they don't close any hospitals in Niagara, then the Premier's promise will have been kept. That's why I was encouraged when it said "for many more years to come" in the Premier's letter. I know that wouldn't just be a standard letter that the Premier puts out to any organization. I know he really meant it and I intend to hold him to that promise, just as I intend to hold the Minister of Transportation to the promise that St Catharines will continue to have the headquarters, the central office, of the Ministry of Transportation.

There's a feeling out there, with some justification, that slowly they're bleeding the employees away and back to Toronto. It's treated more as a regional office today than a central office. There's a fear out there about that. I don't want to fan the flames of fear.

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Transportation): That's unfounded.

Mr Bradley: The minister says it's unfounded. Just as I'm sure the Premier would be good in his word about not closing any hospitals in Ontario, I know the minister's word would be just as good as the Premier's word, and I'll give it the same degree of credence I will give the Premier's word.

The municipal cutbacks: I even have Conservatives locally who are beside themselves over the cutbacks coming to municipalities, because they recognize that when the Harris government downloads responsibility and financial obligations to municipalities, they have a combination of three choices: They can cut services, and heaven knows they've already had to cut services over the years — they can cut services further; or they can raise taxes and try to maintain some semblance of service; or they can add user fees.

We know that user fees do not take into account an individual's ability to pay. The children of people of modest and low income will not have the same opportunities if

their children have to pay these huge user fees, which will not as adversely impact upon those who have some degree of wealth in our communities. Many of the elected municipal representatives are going to be very concerned when they see those tax bills come out. I know my friend from Carleton would agree with me, because he knows of the struggles that the people of modest and lower income in his community have.

I want him to take that message to his fellow colleagues, just as I want him to take the message about the recent appointments to the Niagara Escarpment Commission. If Norm Sterling were the minister, I can tell you that Mr Seabrook from the Grey county area would not have been appointed. Mr Seabrook may be nice man, but he has opposed the Niagara Escarpment Commission for a long time. I see others being appointed who don't really have much faith in the role the commission would play.

I felt, fine, as long as Norm Sterling was in charge as Minister of Environment and Energy I didn't have a fear, because I knew he wouldn't allow those kinds of appointments. But his friend Mike Harris, just after he denounced him over auto emissions, yanked him out of that responsibility and gave it to the Minister of Natural Resources, and now all the people who want to develop lands under the jurisdiction of the Niagara Escarpment Commission are rubbing their hands and saying: "At last. We got rid of Sterling. He's pushed aside. Now we can develop those lands the way we want to develop them."

I know seniors out there concerned about the fact that this government is getting rid of rent control are perturbed not only at that but what their future might be if they have to go into a hospital, because today in hospitals you cannot get the same service you once did. The employees are eager to give that service; they're working hard, they're well overworked, but the budgets have been drastically cut.

When I hear the government list all the announcements it's making about reinvestments, those are routine investments. They've always been made in the health care system. What isn't routine and what isn't new is the fact that the government has cut millions upon millions of dollars from the health care system. What are they going to do? They're going to put video lottery terminals in every bar and every restaurant, in every town and every community and every village of this province to get money to pay for that lost money, for the tax cut for the rich.

Mr Christopherson: I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. Like my colleagues in the Liberal opposition party, I think there ought to be no doubt that this is not a case of the government listening and caring and responding to the concerns they've heard out there.

One of the members, either the parliamentary assistant or the member for Scarborough Centre, who led off for the government, said: "The labour movement had these concerns, so we changed it. Then they had these concerns, so we changed it. Then they had a few more concerns, so of course we changed those." What a joke, really. I know that phrase has been used. It is the only way to truly characterize the feeble defence of the government members trying to rationalize, explain and at the end of the day apologize to their supporters for what was clearly a cave-in.

It really was a question of this government recognizing through their polling — because we know they do massive polling — that they had finally picked a fight they were going to lose. We said it would take time. Anyone who wants to search the Hansards can see that we said, "It'll take some time for people to truly catch on to this agenda."

It's easy for us here to see it because we deal with it every day. We know what this group is all about. We can interpret, because of our experience, how quick the realities of what they're announcing will be and how that will play out in our communities. So we said, "We see it and we know people aren't believing us right now," because our job is to be the opposition, so to a large degree we get sort of written off, but we said over time, as the evidence shows itself, people will begin to understand clearly that this is a government that takes care of the very privileged few. To the rest of us in the majority: "Tough."

As long as this government can fathom bumper-sticker slogans for any election, including the next one, that lets them get whatever percentage it takes for them to win a majority government, that's the last time anything outside the privileged few ever gets heard from again. Certainly, it's the last time they're ever listened to again.

For those who doubt that, I would offer up what I think is — I may get this sucker framed. I think this is beautiful. This went out the day after the government's full retreat, where they finally recognized that: "Yes, it's not just labour. We weren't able to isolate them. Communities were supporting them." All workers in all communities — public, private, union and non-union — were recognizing that this was their fight for their communities. Their neighbours, their families, their friends were under attack, and they had to respond. As anyone watching has learned from this government, if you weren't hit the first month and you weren't hit in the first six months or the first year or even the second year, you now know that if you weren't one of those hit in that period of time, it's only because your time is coming. Ask those who got hit in the second year but not the first and maybe didn't say anything and speak out.

1650

The polling showed them that that's what was happening. People were becoming aware of what this truly meant and they were prepared to support the public sector workers and their families and the communities those families live in in their struggle against this bully government.

The day after, across Canada NewsWire comes a news release from Ontarians for Responsible Government. They're big fans of this government. Unless I'm mistaken, I think they're the ones that sponsor those interesting billboards not too far from here. I think that's the same group. Very interested in politics they are, have a clear point of view. I can't think of anything I agree with them about, but they feel the same way about what I think. That's fine. That's how democracy works. But that is who

this news release is from. What does it say? This is after they heard the announcement from the government and realized everything they were doing in terms of recognizing the victory of not just unions but of working people in communities. What did they say the day after?

"Ontarians for Responsible Government is demanding that Labour Minister Elizabeth Witmer resign. 'After today's astonishing and inexplicable reversal on Bill 136, Witmer has no choice but to resign,' says ORG president Colin T. Brown. 'She's lost her credibility.'

"Brown was reacting to the news that Witmer was offering huge concessions to union bosses regarding Bill 136. 'If Premier Harris's handlers and spin doctors think this nauseating and cowardly policy retreat will help them in the polls, they are sadly mistaken,' says Brown. 'It won't win them the support of Liberals or NDPers. It will drive away Conservatives.'

"Brown also says today's Tory surrender won't bring about peace with the union bosses. 'Appeasement never works,' says Brown. 'The union bosses learned today that they can win with threats, blackmail and bullying'" — end quote, end news release.

I just think it's absolutely special that we have a news release from Ontarians for Responsible Government calling on Elizabeth Witmer to resign because of — how did they word it? A wonderful turn of phrase: "nauseating and cowardly policy retreat."

Sometimes we give them too much credit. For a lot of the things that turn out in their favour, we sometimes have a tendency to overanalyse and say, "They really do know how to manage these things and their spin doctoring is excellent." Obviously, that's not what happened. Otherwise, I suspect that all those entities that would need to be on side politically weren't, because they couldn't be. They didn't agree with what the government was doing because what the government was doing was bowing to the fact that they couldn't win the fight.

That's what you've done on virtually every other occasion. You've taken on the most vulnerable or those you perceive to be vulnerable. You've taken on everybody that you think you could win a fight with, based on your polling and what you're prepared to message through spin doctoring. By and large, unfortunately for the majority of people in this province, middle-class people included big-time, and our communities and our health care system and our education system, unfortunately for all those entities, you have succeeded in bullying and pushing your way around by and large, with a few exceptions.

This was the first time you lost. As I said in my opening remarks, I believe it's because more and more people are aware of what you're doing and why you're doing it. You don't have the best interest of the majority of Ontarians at heart or you wouldn't do the things that make our communities, part of the largest province in a nation that three or four times now has been declared the best place in the world to live — there's a reason for that. There's a reason that we were declared the best place to live. It's because of the quality of life of our communities, and our communities are not those few little pockets of people who are lucky enough to have a huge amount of money and therefore can buy privately anything they need.

If the average middle-class working person needs health care, the only way they're going to get a decent health care system is if all the people in the province pool their resources and make sure we have the hospitals and the system and the experts and the medicine necessary to give us the kind of health care system we deserve. If you've got enough money in the bank, you don't need to rely on that. You can go anywhere. You can just nip down to the States, where they've got all kinds of private health care. Mind you, it's excellent. There's no question it's an excellent health care system but you've got to have the scratch, and if you've got the scratch you can access it. But for those who don't, they need the collective ability of all of us participating to ensure that that health care system is there.

Tommy Douglas believed that as an idea, because of his own experience and his own childhood, and he believed it all the way through his adult life, through the time that he was a minister in the church up to the point he became Premier of Saskatchewan. After he balanced the budget and took care of the finances, towards the end of his 16 years as Premier, he introduced that first universal health care system. Then, because of the pressure that the CCF and the NDP brought to bear on federal governments, we saw the national health care system. That's how we got it. In Ontario it's under attack. We stand to lose that, in large part so you can find the $5 billion and $6 billion a year necessary to pay for your disgusting tax cut.

This is clearly a victory for labour. Even your own friends and supporters, through what they have said publicly, prove the point, as does the fact that you virtually gutted the whole bill. What you put in place originally and stood so proudly defending, including my colleague from Hamilton West, who was so proud to stand up the day before you did your retreat and offer her unquestioning, unvarnished support for Bill 136 as it stood — and I'll come back to that in a few minutes — up until then, you were going after the labour movement, you were going after working people.

It matters that we understand exactly what the government was intending if we want to comprehend where they are and why they're there now. I will be breaking my comments into three main parts: (1) the intent of the original Bill 136, (2) the process that was used throughout all of this, and (3) the continuing damage that the current Bill 136, in its final form, will do and who it will hurt.

First of all, make no mistake: The government's intent was clear. They decided how they were going to respond to the employer pressure on them to solve their problems. I'd be the last one to say that they didn't have legitimate concerns, just like employees and their union representatives had legitimate concerns. The problem with all of this and this whole Bill 136 is that only the employer side of the equation was listened to. That's why it was so patently unfair. When the government says, "We made all

these changes because we're the kind of government that listens; that's what we do," the fact is that if that were true, why would a government put this whole province through the process they did, creating another crisis, lighting the fuse with a time allocation motion the day before they retreated, which is the most bizarre political act I've seen in my seven years here? You're about to retreat, and the day before you do that, you go and antagonize the enemy as strongly as you can and be as provocative as you can be. The day before the minister was to stand up and say, "I give; I can't take on every community and every working person in this province and therefore, on behalf of the government, I announce that we quit, we give, we surrender," the day before that she stood up and did a time allocation motion with the original Bill 136 in front of us and said, "I'm going to ram this sucker through in a few days."

1700

"Bizarre" is the only way to describe what kind of political thinking was going on that led to that happening. Maybe at some point in history I'll fully understand what took place, but in terms of the government's thinking on this, that remains to be seen.

The government was clearly not wanting to listen to anyone other than their employer pals, otherwise they would have met with the labour leaders before they tabled the bill. That is not a revolutionary or draconian idea. If it were a government, which it isn't, that wanted to listen and wanted to go through the process of give and take, recognizing that there are balancing issues necessary when you're dealing with labour relations — that's the whole point of it, to enshrine in law fairness and balance — if they truly believed that, I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to realize you would pick up the phone before you tabled the bill, before you wrote the bill. You would pick up the phone, meet with some of the labour leaders of the working people who are affected and you would start to measure what your own thinking was when you initiated the process and what the two sides are saying and where they're going to be politically and substantively if you go down certain directions. Then you would sit back and say, "Okay, we've got some ideas here." You may or may not have more meetings, but at least you would be engaged in a process that recognized that you wanted to listen to both sides.

Therein lies the flaw in your argument that you made these changes because you were listening. That's my point. You are using the argument that you made all these changes because you're so concerned and you were listening, and I'm saying that the facts do not bear that out. The reality is, had you really wanted to listen, you would have met with Gord Wilson of the Ontario Federation of Labour, Leah Casselman of OPSEU, Sid Ryan of CUPE and other representatives before you put pen to paper, and you would have done the same thing on the employer side. I'm not advocating a reversal of your unfairness; I'm saying that if you want to listen and you want to consider what people have to say, that's how you go about it. It sure looks to us as though all you did was talk to one side, and that one side's message is pretty clear.

When we had your version of hearings, which I'll speak about in a moment, one of the presentations was from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Again, these are people who have a very distinct point of view. They're entitled to have it. It is a credible point of view from their perspective. But like the Ontario Federation of Labour, their primary concern is to represent their members — nothing wrong with that. That's how a pluralistic society works. Even with all its faults — and there are those who can make much better arguments than I about the problems with it — that's the one we have and that's the one that has served us well so far.

I have no problem with what they do. I have a problem with the fact that this government only listens to this point of view and refuses to acknowledge and listen to a different point of view, that of the families and the working people who are affected by your legislation. They are entitled to be heard. You have no right to deny them.

What do they say at the hearings? "The business community is critically interested in ensuring that government services are provided and implemented in a cost-effective and efficient manner. Disruption to municipal services, education, and hospital services can have a significant impact on the economic wellbeing of the province and on the ability of our membership to conduct business effectively."

It also has a major impact on the people who are out on strike; in fact, far more so than municipal councils themselves, because they still exist. The elected people are still there and their cheques are coming. For most business people, their business continues to operate, thanks to your scab legislation which allows those striking workers to be outside while scabs are brought in and take their jobs away. You never give any emphasis to that. You always see it as just a disruption to service and its effect on business. Yes, that's true; that does happen. There is a disruption and it is an inconvenience, but people don't do that lightly. That's what you refuse to listen to, the fact that people only do that when their backs are to the wall.

Sound familiar? That's what is going on with the people at Copps Coliseum in the downtown of Hamilton right now in the heart of my riding. Same thing. You got their backs up against the wall.

People do not vote to go on strike lightly. Anybody who has spent any time in the working world would know that, particularly anybody who has been on or led strikes for any period of time, and you watch what happens to some people and how difficult it is. There's never any certainty when you go out. You never know when you're coming back.

My concern with the chamber of commerce presentation is that there is no recognition of that. Again, they don't have to; they're not elected to represent those people. But obviously the government bought 100% into this view, that the inconvenience and the disruption were greater than obviously the pressure and the hit and the takeaway on those working people, who felt they had no

other choice but to vote to withhold their labour because there wasn't a fair reflection of what they are worth on the negotiating table. The chamber of commerce does not have an obligation to reflect that point of view; the government of Ontario does. Particularly when you're rewriting key parts of labour legislation, you have an obligation to consider that point of view.

They go on to say in their presentation: "As is evidenced by the public sector unions' general reaction to the proposed amalgamation of these entities, unions will naturally resist any changes which have the potential of reducing existing terms and conditions of employment." Damn right.

"This means that during negotiations for the resultant collective agreement of the amalgamated enterprise, the unions will attempt to ensure that the best terms and conditions of employment in any of the units prevail in the amalgamated entity. This interest has the potential of increasing the costs of employment over those costs which prevailed in the prior institutions."

Okay. Again, obviously the government bought into that line totally. What I read into that is, then it's okay for everybody in this new, amalgamated entity to take the lowest dollar and lowest benefit of any of the merging entities. That's what I get from that, because it says there is this big threat of the increase of costs and the unions are going to fight to preserve the best they can for their members and they're going to fight for the best wages of all those that are being combined and the best benefits.

Yes. That's what they are there for; that's what they need to do. People don't need unions to negotiate their standard of living down. They join unions to raise their standard of living because of, again — guess what? — the strength of the collective, of people who don't have individual power and influence and strength joining together to create an offsetting balance of those who do. That's not some kind of wild lefty kind of thinking, in my opinion. I think that's just a reflection of what has made Ontario great, what has made Canada great, and it's also something that you are totally blind to, totally.

1710

For some of you, especially the Reformers over there, you may think, "Oh, yeah, from a business point of view the only thing that ought to happen is that whatever the lowest wage is, the lowest benefit, that's what they all ought to get." That's fine for you or fine for those who think that way, because most of them who do are living quite well, thank you very much. They aren't the ones who have to see a 10%, 20% or 30% reduction in their standard of living. They aren't the ones who have to go back and tell their kids: "No, we can't go on that vacation this year because Daddy had to take a pay cut because of Mike Harris's new legislation, and oh, by the way, there won't be any new clothes for school. You're going to have to wait for them at Christmastime, because they're going to become your Christmas present." No thought of that, but that's the reality for the people who are affected by this, and it's common with this government. Everything you do is a race to the bottom. Who pays the least? What pays the least? What is the lowest benefit available that we can point to and then say, "There, they're only getting that, so you clearly must be overpaid and underworked; you must be."

The chamber goes on to say, "Obviously, this is likely to be resisted by the amalgamated entity and could, therefore, create the potential of significant work disruption in those areas of the public service that have the right to strike." Again it's that point of view that sees working people and their elected representatives as evil, because the fact of the matter is, as Judy Darcy, the national president of CUPE has said, there is not on record anywhere in Canada a strike by public sector workers solely because of amalgamation or mergers. There's no evidence. You can create this myth, as they do, if you see the world that way. I can understand it, but Ontarians do not have the luxury of their government thinking that way. That's why we've got this agenda of yours: You do see it this way.

So what's the fact? The fact is that there hasn't been one. Does that guarantee there would never be another one? No, it does not guarantee that, but it does put a lie to the argument that because of the nature of unions and what motivates them, there will definitely be all these strikes. We know that's not the case, and I thank Judy very much for bringing that forward.

The last reference I have on the chamber of commerce presentation is their paragraph: "We are, therefore, very concerned with the government's expressed intention to allow those municipal workers and education workers who presently enjoy the right to strike to retain that right in this transition phase. However, the union's expressed intention to deal with this right in a responsible manner will be demonstrated by their conduct throughout this ongoing process."

What about the employer's responsibility? It takes two to tango. It takes two to negotiate. Strikes don't happen because of one side. It takes both parties to cause a strike, just like it takes both parties to reach an agreement. Again, this point of view, legitimate in its own right, cannot be adopted by a government — or shouldn't have been, because obviously you did — because, again, it leaves the impression that it's only the workers who cause strikes and that they're the ones who have to show their responsibility.

The whole point of labour legislation and the laws that govern the relations between employers and employees is fairness and balance. This government says those words all the time, but we know what they really think about it. I've said it so often, but I will continue to do so. We know how this government feels about the word "fair." You took the word "fair" out of your brand-new Ontario Labour Relations Act, and you took the word "fair" out of the Workers' Compensation Act. What does that say about your thoughts as they relate to fairness and balance? Also, the original intent of the bill was to take away not only the right to strike but the fair and balanced arbitration system that exists currently.

The Ontario Hospital Association presentation was interesting, and I want to read a few parts of this. "Hospi-

tals are in a period of intense and rapid restructuring, accompanied by massive budget reductions. To date, the Health Services Restructuring Commission has directed 25 hospitals across the province to close. Communities in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Sarnia, Pembroke, London, Ottawa and Toronto have received final decisions from the commission. In Metropolitan Toronto alone, 11 of 44 hospitals are slated for closure. At the same time, these hospitals and others have had their base operating budgets reduced by 5% in 1996-97 and 6% in 1997-98."

There's the context, and in my opinion there's the real worry about what's going to happen in terms of restructuring, what you're doing to the budgets of hospitals that are remaining after your Health Services Restructuring Commission comes in and razes a number of them. You still have yet to announce the money you're reinvesting back into communities so that we can have community care to give us a holistic approach to health care in our communities. That was the whole point of it. The commitment that you will reinvest every dollar saved in your restructuring has not been met, and we await that decision, we await that announcement. Until then, this is what you're going to hear from the Ontario Hospital Association, as well as — I think it was last week — their announcement regarding their very strong concerns about how fast you're moving in this regard. We've heard that before, haven't we?

The member for Scarborough Centre, while I'm on this, likes to talk, both in committee and here, about the fact that there are a number of examples of mergers where it has taken a number of years to resolve certain disputes. He pointed to one in my own community of Hamilton, talking about the merger of the Civic and Chedoke-McMaster and the fact that CUPE had made it clear that it wanted its members to have first priority on any jobs available over non-union members. Every time he has done that, and today included, he always leaves the impression that this is somehow an evil thing.

Mr Preston: It is.

Mr Christopherson: See? You get one of the backbenchers saying, "It is." The fact of the matter is —

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: If you'd stop yapping and listen, I'll give you my point of view, and then you can yap.

Mr Preston: I'm not interested in that point of view.

Mr Christopherson: No, you're not interested in my point of view, I agree, or anybody else's, for that matter, unless it's one of your pals.

Here's how the system should work. The system is that as a union you have an obligation to represent the best interests of your members. You as an MPP have an obligation to represent the best interests of your constituents. Sometimes in the overall scheme of things that's not necessarily what's in the best interests of the province, but that's not your job; you're not the Premier and you're not a minister. You're responsible, as a backbench government member, to represent your constituents' best interests. It's somebody else's job — in your case, it's the cabinet's job to make sure that what they do is fair and balanced for everyone in the province.

So when CUPE does exactly what you're supposed to do here, they're evil and wrong. The Ontario Hospital Association represents the interests of hospitals. That's their job. There's nothing wrong with that. What's wrong is that you want to change the process that resolves this to one that's unfair, because what ought to happen is, in a case like this, if you cannot resolve it, then obviously there needs to be a third party. The third party the unions were recommending in terms of resolving these kinds of disputes is not to take away the right of CUPE to represent their members, but to make sure there was an arbitration and a dispute settlement process that was fair and balanced, and CUPE may or may not win at the end of the day on that argument.

If those other workers were represented by another union, there would be two unions representing two points of view, each representing their own members. Doesn't that sound like pluralism again? The whole point of the process is everybody gets their say and at the point of decision-making there's an impartial, independent, as fair as we can humanly make it system. That's how our justice system operates. That's supposed to be how pluralism and a democratic Ontario operate.

1720

The flaw in this scenario is not CUPE doing its job; the flaw in this scenario is that the changes you were going to make in the original Bill 136 would have taken out the fairness and the independence and the balance of the decision-making at the point where a final resolution to this would be made. That's why people were so riled up under Bill 136 in terms of the arbitration process.

Is that just my opinion? No. Ron Ellis, who was the former chair of WCAT until his untimely demise from that position — and this is not even talking about 136; this is just the other appointments you're making, this is under the current system that has worked relatively well, and we'll talk about that before we leave. Bill 136 would have decimated fairness.

Here are a couple of quotes from his speech to the Canadian Bar Association — Ontario, workers' compensation section, on September 24 of this year, barely a week ago. How did he end his speech? He said:

"It is my submission that the government's use of the reappointments power to screen adjudicators against unknown criteria puts adjudicators and agencies in conflict with the principles of natural justice; that the undermining of the chair's role in the appointments process is wrong-headed and fraught with peril for the future viability of agencies."

He goes on to say, "In my submission, it is time for the Ontario bar — management and employer-side lawyers as well as worker and union-side lawyers, and indeed all lawyers — to recognize that it is necessary that the bar's unified voice in favour of a fundamental structural reform of the appointments process compatible with the survival of a credible administrative justice system, now be heard. What is required, in my view, at this moment" — just to

complete the evening with one more quixotic submission, just to show his sense of humour — "is a royal commission on the appointments process in the administrative justice system."

That's before 136, an expression of concern. I'll tell you, I'm not aware of anyone who questions Mr Ellis's credibility or sincerity or experience. I'll tell you something else: It was also very courageous of him to speak out, because I suspect that's the last time he would even have a shot at any kind of appointment from anything like this government. He did it because he cares about the system.

That's what you're doing to the system of the other appointments that are made through orders in council, never mind what you were going to do with 136. What were you going to do with Bill 136? You were going to set up a system that the arbitrators who would resolve disputes during any mergers or amalgamations would be hand-picked by Mike Harris, and just to nail it down tight, you can't take their decisions to court.

The system right now in the Ontario Labour Relations Act requires that arbitrators be chosen and agreed upon by both sides of the equation, employers' representatives and employees' representatives. They both agree on who will be on this list of arbitrators.

It's not perfect, it has flaws, but both parties are prepared to live with it. That's a major achievement. You've got these inherently opposing views that are going to come to clashes — you can't avoid it; mergers or no mergers, there will always be that clash — agreeing, particularly where there is no right to strike — which you also did to everybody else in the public sector under 136, took away their right to strike, because the second this dispute got referred to your new Dispute Resolution Commission, guess what? They lost their right to strike. Goodbye, free collective bargaining.

The arbitration system was so badly abused by what you were suggesting, because those fair arbitrators that both sides could live with were removed and everything went to the Premier's hand-picked arbitrators. They not only could deal with some of the outstanding issues on the table; they could do anything they wanted to that entire collective agreement — anything.

I don't know about any of my colleagues, but I sure wouldn't want Mike Harris's golf buddies writing my collective agreement. That's in effect what we had. You knew what the implications were for the labour movement. You didn't talk to the labour movement ahead of time because you were planning to ram 136 through, and the only reason you didn't was because your realized through your polling that you couldn't win that fight, because people finally caught on and rallied around what they were going to lose in their communities.

I want to spend just a second, as I said I would, coming back to my neighbour in Hamilton West, who got up — I don't know how she got suckered into this one. She was obviously comfortable with the political positioning, but to get suckered in the night before to give a rah-rah speech on time allocation and on Bill 136 as it originally existed, when the very next day the government was about to run up the white flag — man, oh man, I'd still be steaming, I've got to tell you. If somebody ever did that to me, I'd have gone crazy.

Mr Duncan: Talk about hanging out to dry.

Mr Christopherson: Hanging out to dry big-time. She was so proud of herself. Listen. Here are some quotes. This is what she had to say the night before she realized she was going to be dangled out the window by her ankle:

"I'm pleased to rise in support of the Minister of Labour and the bill that she has brought forward, Bill 136, the Public Sector Transition Stability Act." "Thank you very much. I'm politically dead."

Mr Bradley: Who said that?

Mr Christopherson: That would have been Lillian Ross, the current member for Hamilton West.

Mr Bradley: Is she calling for a public inquiry?

Mr Christopherson: She doesn't want a public inquiry either into the Plastimet fire, no. She has very strange politics for a Hamiltonian, in fact so strange that she talked about the kind of support there is, not even realizing — the thing is going to be blown up the next day. She's standing up there talking about how proud she is to support Bill 136, and then doesn't realize or doesn't factor in that her own city council voted against Bill 136 and called on the government to call it back. The labour movement had done the same thing through the labour council. So had the city council, and we know there are Tories on there. Anybody who knows Hamilton politics will know for sure there are Tories on there whom Ms Ross would have had some occasion to dialogue with.

They took the position that you shouldn't do it. The member for Hamilton West stands in her place and not only talks about how pleased she is, but says: "I think that when you talk about there being no support for this bill, indeed there is some support. I have a couple of supporting letters. One is from the county of Bruce." There's somebody whose own community said no, and she reaches out to some other community to show there is support for this thing.

Mr Wildman: The Premier didn't support it.

Mr Christopherson: That's right. My House leader says the poor member didn't even realize her own Premier didn't support it. Obviously, at the end of the day they didn't, because they retreated on the whole thing — a sad, sad state of affairs for the member for Hamilton West. I can't wait for the debates in the next provincial election.

1730

Let's talk just a little bit — I don't have a lot of time left, and I know how much that will upset the government members; I can hear them groaning already — about the process. My colleagues in the official opposition have made some reference to time frames, and I'll try not to be too repetitive.

One of the things that has to be mentioned again, if it has been mentioned already — if not, it needs to come out — is that on June 4, the day after the labour minister introduced Bill 136 in its original form, she said the

following: "Yes, I commit to you that there will be full public hearings. We will travel the province...."

What happened? We know that the member for Scarborough Centre is oh so proud of the process that was used. He said, "We did teleconferencing," like somehow that was the same thing.

Mr Gilchrist: Videoconferencing.

Mr Christopherson: Videoconferencing. Thank you.

He said, "We did Kincardine, we did Thunder Bay, we did Ottawa and all across the province." No. We did Kincardine, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and nothing else across the province. That was it. In fact — get this — we had a delegation from Hamilton that drove to Kincardine to fill the same time slot they would have had if they had driven to Toronto, except it took them three times as long to get there and three times as long to get back. That is not to say that videoconferencing might not have a role in the future. But it was very lame, very thin, and it bordered on insulting the intelligence of the people of this province to think that a slap-dash videoconferencing process was the same as travelling around the province and giving people their right to be heard on this bill.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: I think you were afraid. You went out on other labour legislation like Bill 49 and you got creamed. You took Bill 99 — that's the attack on injured workers, the WCB legislation — and you made that only six days across the province, in the dead of summer. We got in an extra community, because we did two in one day. You got slaughtered in those communities too.

When you saw what was building on 136, those of us who have been around for a while know what happened: There was a backbench revolt. Everybody in that caucus who might have been earmarked to go on that committee said: "There's no way you're going to get me on that committee. If we all stick together, we can withhold this. If it's only a few of us, we're going to be in trouble, but let's stick together. We can withstand the pressure and tell them we're not going out there and defend this crazy piece of legislation." There you go: Power to the backbenchers. How did you do it? Collectivity again. Every time you don't have power, you find others who don't have power, add it up, and then you can take on those who do. What does that sound like? Sound like democracy? I think so.

I think it also speaks to why unions have been so effective in the past and need to be in the future, especially in the face of this kind of government and your kind of power and abuse of it and the extent to which you are prepared to use it.

The other thing I want to mention on process — again, there's been some talk already. My colleagues have talked about the insult of having amendments in by 10 o'clock on a Monday morning and at 3:30 that afternoon we started to vote. That is such a joke, that whole process. When I was on Hamilton city council, you couldn't get approval to get a stop sign up in your ward as quickly as you rammed through a major piece of labour legislation. We had to have the amendments given in by 10 o'clock, and we had them by, what, close to 11, and at 3:30, with 200 pages of amendments, we were starting to vote. An absolute insult. I know what would have happened with the veterans in the government cabinet, who were over here not that long ago, had we ever attempted to do that.

The last point on process is my question to the Minister of Labour in the time between when she announced her full retreat and when we actually got the amendments; in fact, I think it was the day we got the amendments. I asked her about subsections 15(6) and (7) of schedule B. I said, "There seems to be a problem," which there was. The minister's answer to me was, "If you would give me an opportunity to find it."

Nobody else was allowed an opportunity to reflect on her amendments ahead of time, before they had to come to the committee. None of us was given any time to reflect on them or get legal opinions before we were forced to vote on them as lawmakers. But the minister wanted an opportunity when she was put on the spot. I raise that because it just points out the absolute unfairness and the idiocy of suggesting you could do something in that short a time. She couldn't respond in that short a time. Why should everybody else who's affected by this bill have been forced to follow the same kind of unfair process? No justification for that at all.

I want to move, in the final minutes I have, to what's left in Bill 136. One of the government members suggested that because the galleries aren't full and there's no major rioting outside, obviously everybody's happy with it. Wrong again. The fact of the matter is that the people affected by this realize they've squeezed everything they're going to out of you and there's absolutely no way one of you is suddenly going to rise and change this process. Within the half-hour you're going to vote on this thing, and that's third reading, and then all it takes is the rubber stamp of the Lieutenant Governor and it's the law. They know that.

What's left in this bill is still damaging and ugly. You still leave in requirements for arbitrators to consider ability to pay and best practices. I know you love that stuff and I also realize that at first blush it does sound like it makes sense. Ability to pay: That makes sense, so why shouldn't an arbitrator consider ability to pay? The fact is, whether you're in the public sector or the private sector, I don't know anybody who's ever negotiated with an employer where the employer says at the opening negotiations: "By the way, we've got lots of money we want to give you. We've got so much money that we can't wait to get this contract concluded so we can shovel some of it your way, because you work so hard. So please, give us all your proposals. In fact, we saw some of them. We think you need more, because we've got so much money."

That's not what happens. No employer has an ability to pay, just like everybody in jail is innocent. The premise with the employer is that they can't afford to pay it. Of course that's the premise. They'd be stupid to start anywhere else, whether it's true or not. But we have to realize that what's different about the public sector is that public sector employers, particularly municipalities or entities like them — we're the same; the provincial government and other entities such as us. The difference

between those employers and others is that they decide on their own ability to pay.

In the private sector, a lot of it does depend on how well they're doing out in the marketplace: Is their service or their good selling? Is there growing demand for it? All those factors come into it. When you're a municipality, you decide how much revenue you've got by a vote. It's your own decision. Should you decide to make sure you don't have the ability to pay, you can do that. The government knows that. That's the difficulty. Again, it's not the fairminded councillors and aldermen who people worry about; it's the hard, far-right wing, who see the world the way I mentioned earlier, in terms of ignoring the other side of our reality in this province. That's what the fear is, because this allows them to set up a situation where the ability to pay is not naturally reflected.

1740

The other is best practices. Again, why wouldn't you go with the best practices? It makes some sense. Again, the people who have negotiated with employers, especially the public sector, know that often times those are code words for, "Who pays less wages and who pays less benefits?" You can argue that obviously it's a better practice because you spend less money. So "best practice" are really just code words for the lowest pay going. If they can point to someone else who pays less, then that's a better practice and that has to be considered by the arbitrator. That's still in here. It wasn't before. Bill 136 brings that in.

Again, I would remind people who are watching that if you've got a decent paying job and want to keep it, you'd better make sure there are enough other people around you who have a decent paying job or you're going to find yourself on the other end of best practices. If you are below what people are getting who have collective agreements, the only chance you're ever going to have for someone to stand up and fight for a better minimum wage or give you a bigger share of what you're entitled to is either through your own union or making sure that other unions are bringing the wage up so that if by no other reason than embarrassment, your wages are brought up.

There's a need for everybody to care about the price of labour in the province of Ontario. The value of labour is important to anybody who works for a living. If you're a manager and you think that somehow doesn't include you, think again, and look at your community around you and ask yourself whether this agenda is helping or hurting your lifestyle.

The last two points that I want to raise: pay equity. Today the government, by virtue of not appealing the decision, has acknowledged that the courts were right when they said — this is with regard to your Bill 26, the omnibus bully bill — "It discriminates against proxy sector women by denying them the opportunity of quantifying and correcting the systemic, gender-based wage inequity from which they suffer, a benefit the act grants to other women working in the broader public sector."

The courts also went on to say that your Bill 26 is "unconstitutional and of no force and effect." They also went on to say that clearly you passed Bill 26, with schedule J, which was the heading on that clause, "essentially for fiscal reasons." The courts said, "essentially for fiscal reasons," and therefore you didn't have the right to override the constitutional protection that pay equity had. They denied the government's claim and they overruled that part and today you've admitted to it. Now we want to see you honour the other part of what they said, which is, "Cough up the money." You owe the money.

But you still left in place the fact that there are women now receiving wages that have a pay equity portion to them where they could lose that lawful right because Bill 136 says you don't have to keep the rates that are in effect with a seller if you're the buyer of a new service, or in the case of a merger. There's still a major takeaway that you should be ashamed of in Bill 136 with regard to pay equity.

In terms of the employee wage protection plan, I regret I've left it so late but I have spoken on it at great length many times. This is probably the sickest piece of the whole thing if I had to actually choose. This is a protection for workers who have lost their job and are owed wages and benefits that they worked for. They already worked for them. They're owed that money, but because of the current federal law, which the federal Liberals have to take responsibility for, they end up at the end of the line and rarely get their money.

We brought in a plan that said if that's the case, we'll pay you your money, because a worker can't survive nearly as long without that money as a bank or a finance company can in terms of them getting their share of that bankruptcy or closure, and then we'll use the full force of the government to go after that employer to recoup the money. This government's argument for getting rid of it is: "It's funded by taxpayer money. It shouldn't be funded. Why should taxpayers pay for this?"

They don't answer the question, "Why do taxpayers pay for the police and the court system when banks are robbed?" That's not the taxpayers' money either; it's the banks' money. When police forces spend a lot of time in uncovering credit card fraud, all of the police work, all of the court system paid for by all the taxpayers, it's not their credit card money. If there's a rape victim, do you charge her for the police and the court system to prosecute the person who raped her? If you're a victim of violent crime, you can claim money from a compensation fund, all paid for from taxpayer money.

But under Mike Harris's Ontario, if you're a worker who's unfortunate enough to work somewhere that's gone bankrupt or moved or refuses to pay you, you're out of luck. They killed the one plan that you had. You've left that in Bill 136, and I think that is the sickest, most depraved aspect and clearly shows what you're all about. It is so sick that you would do that to people who by and large earn minimum wage.

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order of the House dated September 17, 1997, I am now required to put the question. Mr Maves has moved third reading of Bill 136. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1747 to 1752.

The Speaker: All those in favour please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Grimmett, Bill	Palladini, Al
Baird, John R.	Hamick, Charles	Parker, John L.
Bassett, Isabel	Hastings, John	Pettit, Trevor
Beaubien, Marcel	Hudak, Tim	Preston, Peter
Boushy, Dave	Jackson, Cameron	Rollins, E.J. Douglas
Brown, Jim	Johns, Helen	Ross, Lillian
Carr, Gary	Johnson, Bert	Runciman, Robert W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Johnson, David	Sampson, Rob
Clement, Tony	Jordan, W. Leo	Shea, Derwyn
Danford, Harry	Kells, Morley	Sheehan, Frank
DeFaria, Carl	Klees, Frank	Smith, Bruce
Doyle, Ed	Leach, Al	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Brenda	Leadston, Gary L.	Stewart, R. Gary
Eves, Ernie L.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Fisher, Barbara	Maves, Bart	Tsubouchi, David H.
Flaherty, Jim	McLean, Allan K.	Turnbull, David
Ford, Douglas B.	Munro, Julia	Vankoughnet, Bill
Fox, Gary	Murdoch, Bill	Villeneuve, Noble
Froese, Tom	Newman, Dan	Wood, Bob
Galt, Doug	O'Toole, John	Young, Terence H.
Gilchrist, Steve	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Speaker: All those opposed please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Cullen, Alex	Lessard, Wayne
Bisson, Gilles	Duncan, Dwight	Martel, Shelley
Boyd, Marion	Gerretsen, John	McLeod, Lyn
Bradley, James J.	Grandmaître, Bernard	Miclash, Frank
Caplan, David	Gravelle, Michael	Pouliot, Gilles,
Castrilli, Annamarie	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Ramsay, David
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Sergio, Mario
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Wildman, Bud
Conway, Sean G.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Wood, Len
Cordiano, Joseph	Lankin, Frances	
Crozier, Bruce	Laughren, Floyd	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 62; the nays are 34.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

It now being nearly 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned till half past 6.

The House recessed from 1755 to 1832.

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Mardi 7 octobre 1997

Speaker
Honourable Chris Stockwell

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Chris Stockwell

Greffier
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 7 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 7 octobre 1997

The House met at 1832.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIR MUNICIPAL FINANCE ACT, 1997 (No. 2)

LOI DE 1997 SUR LE FINANCEMENT ÉQUITABLE DES MUNICIPALITÉS (N° 2)

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 149, An Act to continue the reforms begun by the Fair Municipal Finance Act, 1997 and to make other amendments respecting the financing of local government / Projet de loi 149, Loi continuant les réformes amorcées par la Loi de 1997 sur le financement équitable des municipalités et apportant d'autres modifications relativement au financement des administrations locales.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 2, 1997, I'm now required to put the question. Mr Eves has moved second reading of Bill 149. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; this will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1833 to 1838.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gilchrist, Steve	Newman, Dan
Baird, John R.	Grimmett, Bill	O'Toole, John
Bassett, Isabel	Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Beaubien, Marcel	Harnick, Charles	Parker, John L.
Boushy, Dave	Hastings, John	Pettit, Trevor
Brown, Jim	Hudak, Tim	Preston, Peter
Carr, Gary	Jackson, Cameron	Rollins, E.J. Douglas
Chudleigh, Ted	Johns, Helen	Runciman, Robert W.
Clement, Tony	Johnson, Bert	Sampson, Rob
Cunningham, Dianne	Johnson, David	Shea, Derwyn
Danford, Harry	Jordan, W. Leo	Sheehan, Frank
DeFaria, Carl	Kells, Morley	Smith, Bruce
Doyle, Ed	Klees, Frank	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Brenda	Leach, Al	Stewart, R. Gary
Eves, Ernie L.	Leadston, Gary L.	Tascona, Joseph N.
Fisher, Barbara	Martiniuk, Gerry	Turnbull, David
Flaherty, Jim	Maves, Bart	Vankoughnet, Bill
Ford, Douglas B.	McLean, Allan K.	Villeneuve, Noble
Fox, Gary	Munro, Julia	Wood, Bob
Froese, Tom	Murdoch, Bill	Young, Terence H.
Galt, Doug		

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the clerk.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Cullen, Alex	Martel, Shelley
Bisson, Gilles	Duncan, Dwight	McLeod, Lyn
Boyd, Marion	Gerretsen, John	Miclash, Frank
Bradley, James J.	Grandmaître, Bernard	Morin, Gilles E.
Caplan, David	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Castrilli, Annamarie	Hoy, Pat	Pouliot, Gilles
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Silipo, Tony
Conway, Sean G.	Lankin, Frances	Wildman, Bud
Cordiano, Joseph	Laughren, Floyd	Wood, Len
Crozier, Bruce	Lessard, Wayne	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 61; the nays are 38.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 2, this bill is referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ÉDUCATION

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, and enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size / Projet de loi 160, Loi visant à réformer le système scolaire, à protéger le financement des classes, à accroître l'obligation de rendre compte et à apporter d'autres améliorations compatibles avec la politique du gouvernement en matière de qualité de l'éducation, y compris l'amélioration du rendement des élèves et la réglementation de l'effectif des classes.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 7, 1997, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Snobelen has moved second reading of Bill 160. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; this will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1842 to 1847.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gilchrist, Steve	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Grimmett, Bill	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bassett, Isabel	Hardeman, Ernie	Palladini, Al
Beaubien, Marcel	Harnick, Charles	Parker, John L.
Boushy, Dave	Hastings, John	Pettit, Trevor
Brown, Jim	Hudak, Tim	Preston, Peter
Carr, Gary	Jackson, Cameron	Rollins, E.J. Douglas
Chudleigh, Ted	Johns, Helen	Runciman, Robert W.
Clement, Tony	Johnson, Bert	Sampson, Rob
Cunningham, Dianne	Johnson, David	Shea, Derwyn
Danford, Harry	Jordan, W. Leo	Sheehan, Frank
DeFaria, Carl	Kells, Morley	Smith, Bruce
Doyle, Ed	Klees, Frank	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Brenda	Leach, Al	Stewart, R. Gary
Eves, Ernie L.	Leadston, Gary L.	Tascona, Joseph N.
Fisher, Barbara	Martiniuk, Gerry	Turnbull, David
Flaherty, Jim	Maves, Bart	Vankoughnet, Bill
Ford, Douglas B.	McLean, Allan K.	Villeneuve, Noble
Fox, Gary	Munro, Julia	Wood, Bob
Froese, Tom	Murdoch, Bill	Young, Terence H.
Galt, Doug	Newman, Dan	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Cullen, Alex	Martel, Shelley
Bisson, Gilles	Duncan, Dwight	McLeod, Lyn
Boyd, Marion	Gerretsen, John	Miclash, Frank
Bradley, James J.	Grandmaître, Bernard	Morin, Gilles E.
Caplan, David	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Castrilli, Annamarie	Hoy, Pat	Pouliot, Gilles
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Silipo, Tony
Conway, Sean G.	Lankin, Frances	Wildman, Bud
Cordiano, Joseph	Laughren, Floyd	Wood, Len
Crozier, Bruce	Lessard, Wayne	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 62; the nays are 38.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 6, this bill is referred to the standing committee on the administration of justice.

EDUCATION VOTING RIGHTS ACT (COTTAGERS AND OTHERS), 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR LE DROIT DE VOTE LORS DES ÉLECTIONS SCOLAIRES (PROPRIÉTAIRES DE CHALET ET AUTRES)

Mr Smith moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 158, An Act to amend the Education Act to allow non-resident owners or tenants of residential property to vote for members of district school boards and school authorities / Projet de loi 158, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en vue de permettre aux propriétaires ou locataires non résidents d'un bien résidentiel de voter lors de l'élection des membres des conseils scolaires de district et des administrations scolaires.

Mr Bruce Smith (Middlesex): Mr Speaker, I'll be sharing my time this evening with the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, as well as my colleague from the riding of Peterborough. and I'll be adding a few comments this evening.

I'm certainly pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments with respect to Bill 158, the Education Voting Rights Act. This bill will amend the Education Act by allowing non-resident owners and tenants of residential or farm properties and their spouses to vote for school board trustees in areas where the owner rents such properties.

Under the Fewer School Boards Act, 1997, non-resident ratepayers lost their right to vote for the school boards in the area where they owned a cottage or property. This step was taken to reflect the policy decision to take education off the residential property tax. In subsequent discussions with municipal representatives a decision was made that only 50% of the residential education property tax would be removed. This change provides the basis for restoring the right to vote for this group of residential ratepayers.

The bill itself will affect an estimated 890,000 non-resident farm and residential property ratepayers, primarily cottage owners. It would ensure that they have the opportunity to have their electoral voice heard in the upcoming municipal elections this November. As many will know, these local elections will see trustees elected to serve on Ontario's new district school boards and on school authorities. Obviously the trustees elected next month will play a key role in realizing Ontario's new vision for education. They will represent the public in their communities and work towards setting local policies and priorities to improve the quality of education in this province.

It is the intent of this government to restore these voting rights in time for the November elections. The electoral information is being revised to reflect change proposed in this bill. Should the Legislature approve the bill, the changes to voting rights would be communicated to all municipal clerks and deputy returning officers as soon as possible. The electoral information would be forwarded to municipal clerks to enable them to make the necessary revisions to the voters lists. Recent changes in the Municipal Elections Act allow voters to identify themselves as qualified electors right up to and including polling day. Qualified non-resident ratepayers need only produce proper proof of ownership or tenancy.

With this bill, the government continues its practice of working with our municipal partners to achieve a smooth transition to a more efficient and effective government throughout Ontario. With that, I will conclude my comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

Mr Bill Grimmett (Muskoka-Georgian Bay): It certainly is a pleasure for me to speak to this bill and to congratulate the minister and his parliamentary assistant for the sensitivity that they've demonstrated in recognizing that since the passage of the Fewer School Boards Act, the municipalities approached the government and indicated that they were not prepared to support the idea of having the complete residential portion of the education bill lifted and transferred to the province in exchange for the original Who Does What responsibilities.

Once the province had recalibrated the exchange of responsibilities with the municipalities and decided that one half of the education bill would become the responsibility of the province, I certainly began to hear from a number of stakeholders in my riding, particularly members of the board of education, that they felt it was unfair, that Bill 104 had taken away the vote from the seasonal residents, given that they were now going to be responsible for paying for education again.

It took me back to the time I originally decided that I would run for the school board in Muskoka and the interview that was conducted by the Muskoka Lakes Association. The Muskoka Lakes Association represents seasonal residents and year-round residents, but primarily seasonal residents, in Muskoka. In the township of Muskoka Lakes where I reside, there are far more seasonal residents than there are year-round residents. In fact, most of the assessment in that municipality is represented by owners who are seasonal residents. Some people call them cottagers and the year-round residents are usually referred to as the locals.

When you're a local member of either the school board or the municipal council, you have to be sensitive to the fact that there are interests that are represented by the seasonal residents, despite the fact that to a large extent they make no use of the education system. They do to a large extent fund it under the current model and, under the model that's proposed, they will be continuing to participate in the funding.

I asked my staff to do some research to determine approximately how many of the eligible voters in my riding were resident year-round and how many were resident in the summer season. In the township of Muskoka Lakes there are 17,368 eligible voters, 12,978 of those are non-resident. About 75% of the eligible voters in that township are cottagers or seasonal residents and they pay an extraordinary amount of the property tax in that municipality and that of course is transferred to the board of education under the current model.

Both the township of Georgian Bay and the township of Lake of Bays are in the district of Muskoka, and in the Simcoe portion of my riding, there's Tay township and Severn township and the town of Midland also has a very high ratio of seasonal residents. All of those people, I'm sure, were quite concerned when it became obvious that under Bill 104, where they had been deprived of their right to vote for school board representatives, they were, under the newly revised Who Does What process, possibly going to be in a position where they were paying taxes but were unable to vote in the education portion of the election.

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The first person who brought this to my attention — I was in a parade in Gravenhurst and I was marching next to some school board trustees, and they all decided to lobby me while we were walking down the streets of Gravenhurst. They immediately asked me to pursue the idea of restoring the vote to the seasonal residents. I think this is certainly laudable, for local members of the board of education to recognize that they weren't going to take advantage of the seasonal residents, notwithstanding that, to a large extent, the elected people had lived in Muskoka year-round for their whole lives.

In fact, the mix of seasonal residents and year-round residents in the part of the world I live in adds to the richness of life there. Certainly as a person moving there in my early twenties to live in a small community and practise law I was fascinated by the political process that went on municipally and in the board of education, and I was disappointed by the lack of interest from the cottage community in the board of education election races. When I finally decided to run in 1991, I found it quite interesting to attend meetings where the cottage associations would cross-examine me and ask me for my views on the cottagers and how they contributed to the cost of education in Muskoka and how little their contribution appeared to be recognized at the school board level.

Certainly, having gone through that process twice in two elections and having lived in a part of the province where the economy is to a large extent underwritten by seasonal residents, I'm very sensitive to the need to allow people who are paying the freight to have the opportunity to vote for their education representatives.

With the passage of an earlier bill, these seasonal residents will have the opportunity throughout my riding, except in one municipality, to partake in the vote not by attending at the ballot box but by using either mail-in or phone-in voting methods. Certainly I think a lot of people in Simcoe and Muskoka are going to be paying close attention to the vote that's going to be taking place this November, because they will be anticipating that there will be a higher percentage of non-resident voters taking part in both the municipal election and in the election for school board trustees. That certainly is my hope as well, because I think it's important for people who participate in the process by paying taxes to also participate in the process of electing their representatives. That gives them more ownership in the process and perhaps will lead to a better relationship between the people who represent the seasonal residents and their associations.

From the statistics I was able to find, there's a surprisingly low number of voters in cottage county who are seasonal residents who actually participate in the election process locally, despite the fact that they do pay about 80% of the tax in the rural parts of both Muskoka and some parts of Simcoe county.

In the township of Muskoka Lake, 784 of the 3,100 people who voted did so in advance polls. I think that

shows that there's a very low turnout of eligible seasonal residents, and it's certainly something we need to concern ourselves with.

The need to recognize the participation of the seasonal residents is very evident when you look at the number of non-resident farm and residential property ratepayers who are actually affected by this legislation. The Ministry of Education and Training estimates that the legislation will affect about 890,000 non-resident voters throughout the province. I think we should all pay close attention, providing this bill carries, to the impact that the new method of voting has on how many of those 890,000 people actually choose to participate.

This bill addresses one of the basic principles in a democracy, that a ratepayer who has the right to elect a trustee — they'll be spending the property tax dollars — should have the opportunity to participate in electing those people.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Yes, but who sets the mill rate? Ernie Eves.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Algoma, you'll have your turn. Just be patient.

Mr Grimmett: This is a housekeeping bill, and this housekeeping bill addresses a concern that came up after the Fewer School Boards Act was passed, and again I think it demonstrates how our government is listening not only to our municipal partners and our partners in education but also to the people who live and pay the taxes in the part of Ontario that is also known as cottage country.

The non-resident ratepayers will continue to pay some education property tax, and they should have the right to vote for school board trustees. Hopefully we will get all three parties to cooperate on this legislation. I think it's important that we do that, so we can ensure when the elections come up in November our seasonal residents in Ontario will have the opportunity to fully participate not only in the municipal portion but also in the education portion.

I thought I'd just take a minute to indicate that there's a considerable amount of support from the cottagers' associations in Ontario. The umbrella organization that represents cottage associations is called the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, and one of the leader spokespersons for that organization is John Birnbaum, who is also the executive director of the Georgian Bay Association. I know he spent a lot of time on the phone not only with me and my staff but also with people from the Ministry of Education and people from the Premier's office encouraging them to proceed with this legislation and move it ahead. I'm sure they've also been in touch with members of the opposition to make sure the opposition cooperates to make sure this legislation moves ahead so that we can pave the way for a fall election in which the seasonal residents will be able to fully participate.

I quote Mr Birnbaum in his response to this legislation. "It is reassuring to see the government respond quickly to our concerns, and we encourage all-party support for this initiative. We are delighted that both resident and non-resident taxpayers and electors can now continue to vote and work together for school trustees" —

Interjections.

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): The government messed up in the first place.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Take your seat, please. Order. The member for Algoma, the member for Sudbury East, there is a period where you'll be in a position to ask questions. In the meantime, I would ask you to remain patient and wait for your turn.

Mr Grimmett: As Mr Birnbaum said: "It is reassuring to see the government respond quickly to our concerns, and we encourage all-party support for this initiative. We are delighted that both resident and non-resident taxpayers and electors can now continue to vote and work together for school trustees. This legislation respects our long-standing tradition of bringing the entire community together to govern our schools and support our students."

In closing, I'd like to encourage all members of the House to support this legislation, to make sure that those residents who are seasonal in Ontario will have the opportunity to participate in the November elections for school boards.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): I am pleased also tonight to have the opportunity to share a few of my thoughts regarding Bill 158, the Education Voting Rights Act, 1997. This bill will allow cottagers and non-residential owners and tenants of residential or farm property to vote for school board trustees in the areas where they own or rent property. Bill 158 is not a complex bill. However, it is a very important bill; a bill that represents one more example of legislation that will deal with another controversial issue at the municipal level; a bill that ensures the most fundamental principle of government, the principle that taxation should not occur without the proper representation, something I am confident all parties in this House should support. This bill, I believe, needs absolutely no debate. It should be passed immediately.

Representing the riding of Peterborough means that I represent a number of cottagers and owners of seasonal properties. They have expressed frustration in their not being able to elect local school board trustees, trustees who have the legal authority to establish local tax rates. They have had this concern for years. They believe their fundamental rights have been violated.

Under this proposed legislation, all ratepayers will have the ability to vote for representatives making the decisions that will impact on their local tax bill. I am confident that every member of this House sees this as a good principle and as good legislation. The education component of our tax system represents the largest portion of local taxes, yet some taxpayers and ratepayers do not have a voice as it stands at the moment.

Bill 158 is a result of this government listening to the taxpayers of this province.

Mr Wildman: It's a result of your messing up.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

1910

Mr Stewart: A long time ago I learned something as a very young man, and I guess it is a long time ago now, that if you're going to point a finger, do it while you're looking in the mirror. I would suggest to the opposition here, especially to some of you who have made major mistakes —

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Stewart: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I was trying to say, it kind of makes me chuckle from time to time that folks have the audacity to suggest that they don't make mistakes. Unfortunately many, certainly in the previous government, did not recognize the mistakes they made and unfortunately we are in the process of having to fix them now.

As I mentioned, Bill 158 is a result of our government listening. Over 890,000 non-resident farm and residential property taxpayers, primarily cottagers, will be permitted to vote for local school board trustees in November under this proposed legislation.

On January 13, 1997, the government announced that residential property taxes would no longer contribute to the financing of education.

Applause.

Mr Stewart: Absolutely, good idea. We've been trying to do that for years and it's unfortunate that you folks did not have that capability.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Peterborough.

Mr Stewart: For those who use the word "stupid" in this House, as I said, please look in the mirror while you're using those words.

My riding, the Kawartha Lakes area, has a great number of cottagers who contribute large amounts of tax dollars to local municipalities and they did not view this component of Bill 104 as being fair and equitable. They were right, absolutely right, and we will stand up and say that, but we will solve the problem.

After consulting with local municipalities and again with AMO, the decision was made that only 50% of the residential education property tax would be removed. This is the fundamental reason why this government will restore the right of cottagers and other property owners to vote for their school boards. Once again, ratepayers should not be expected to pay for local services which they do not use if they do not have a vote or a say in how these tax dollars are spent and used.

When our government was elected in 1995, we firmly believed that the people of Ontario were overgoverned at the provincial level, overgoverned at the municipal level and overgoverned by local school boards. Bill 104 dealt with that issue. It reduced the number of school boards and recalculated the representation. Let us be clear on this issue: Bill 158 will not make any difference in the number of school board trustees. The restoration of the right to vote will not change the definition of an electoral group and will therefore not affect local electoral data already compiled by the Minister of Finance.

Not only does Bill 158 uphold a treasured principle of taxation with representation, this bill will greatly reduce the animosity that exists between seasonal and permanent residents. There has been a definite division between these two groups for many, many years. Those who were permanent residents felt they had that much more say than those who visited the area only during the summer or during the winter. Bill 158 —

Interjection.

Mr Stewart: That's why I suggested we should pass it without debate.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): Shut up.

Mr Stewart: Well, I will when I have finished saying what I think should be said.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not the type of language which is accepted in this House. I would ask you to apologize from your seat, please.

Mr Christopherson: I apologize and withdraw, Speaker.

Mr Stewart: Bill 158 is legislation that I encourage all members of this House to support. It upholds the fundamental principle of democracy. It ensures that taxpayers of this province are treated in a fair and more equitable manner. This legislation is one more example of why the system has to be changed. Cottagers, non-residents, have wanted this legislation for years, and I think it's time to move forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): I listened to the comments from the member of Peterborough with great interest. It's very clear that we're dealing with a piece of legislation that is the hallmark of this government in so far as it has gone too far, too fast. It came in with a previous piece of legislation that was opposed by the groups that were most affected: the cottagers, the school boards. There was an eventual court challenge and it was only through these groups first of all trying to speak to the government and finding that their words were not being listened to, being forced to go through the legal process, and finally causing the government to realize it had overshot the mark. The government is therefore forced to come in, later in the day, with a bill to correct the error it has made.

But there is a clear message here in so far as this government disregards advice that comes from the people who are most affected, disregards the commonsense advice that's being given by the various groups affected and just carries on until oops, it suddenly realizes, after being forced to go through another process, it has made an error.

We see today further examples of that with other legislation that's being presented before this House, particularly with respect, if I can use the example, of Bill 160 where again the government, in the name of trying to empower citizens, is taking over control for itself, and the mistakes it makes at the end of the day are bigger, far bigger because it's a huge, complex organization trying to

make decisions to fit all of Ontario. You just can't have one size fits all.

So here we have a situation of this bill trying to correct a mistake that was made, and unfortunately, as in other pieces of legislation, they just hurry them down the track and make bigger mistakes as they go along. I think the government should think twice about what it's doing.

Mr Christopherson: I want to respond to the comments of the member from Peterborough because I found his the most interesting. It was interesting to listen to the member talk about the fact that — and he drew on great historical quotes: "Taxation without representation is unacceptable." The "unacceptable" is my paraphrase.

What is so unusual is that they're talking about giving the right of the cottage owners to vote for school board trustees because of all these taxation powers, and they're taking away the right of trustees to set the mill rate in Bill 160. So what is this whole big deal all about? All this is about is fixing up the screwup you made in Bill 104. That's exactly what this is.

Here we go again. The government is saying, "We're listening." Under Bill 136 they picked a fight when their polls told them they couldn't win, and when they had to surrender they said, "We were listening." On this one they're saying they listened to the cottagers' concerns and that's why they made the changes. The reality is that of course they heard from the cottagers. They screwed up in Bill 104, which they rammed through this place with a time allocation, and this is to fix it. It wasn't listening; this is fix-it time.

Earlier, Speaker, I had to apologize and withdraw my comment, my heckle, to the member when he kept saying on a number of occasions, "This bill doesn't need any debate," and he continued to debate it. I then hollered that he ought to shut up. You asked me to withdraw it and I did, and apologized.

Basically, this whole bill is one king-sized withdrawal and one king-sized apology for one king-sized screwup by a government that only believes in governing by kings.

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Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I'd like to congratulate my colleagues the members for Middlesex, Muskoka-Georgian Bay and Peterborough for their excellent, well-prepared remarks. They are obviously very correct that the government took the time to listen, particularly to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and not just to listen but to genuinely hear what they were saying, to consult and then to amend the bill.

Mr Wildman: Did the same people prepare them who prepared Bill 104?

The Deputy Speaker: Order, member for Algoma.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex South): I too want to make some comments in that all three members — the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, the member for Peterborough and now the member for Nepean — mentioned how the government listened. They also said — I think the term was "restore the democratic right." In their largess you would think they would say, "What we also want to do is restore the democratic right in this very Legislature," because on every major piece of legislation that has come along since the change in our rules they've stifled debate. They've brought in time allocation.

My constituents from Essex South elected me to come down here and speak about the issues, to speak on the issues, to tell the government what the constituents of Essex South want said. Yet what do they do? They restore the democratic right to the cottagers which they should not have taken away in the first place, and then they turn around and continue to stifle the democratic right of the members to stand in this place.

We were told during the debate on the rules that they would allow their members more time to speak. What has happened? We've even made comment tonight where they thought about not even getting up and speaking on this. We've had time allocation where their members also don't get the opportunity to speak. So when you get up and talk about democracy and listening and wanting to further the cause of democracy, I think a good place you could start is right in this very room.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, you have two minutes.

Mr Grimmett: I'll respond on behalf of my colleagues the member for Middlesex and the member for Peterborough, and I'd like to thank the members for Ottawa West, Hamilton Centre, Nepean and Essex South for their comments. That's a demonstration of the number of members under the new rules who can participate in debate, and I think the quality of debate is excellent. Despite the fact that some members only have two minutes to comment, I think they find that they can make some very salient comments even in a two-minute period.

I want to address the comments made by the member for Ottawa West. While I don't want to get into the details of the challenge to the Fewer School Boards Act, because I understand it's still under appeal, in the initial appeal of it there was, to my knowledge, no mention of the issue of the voting rights of non-residents. That's not an issue that's under appeal.

Mr Cullen: Certainly you heard that from cottagers.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Ottawa West.

Mr Grimmett: That's not an issue, to my knowledge, under appeal.

However, I wanted to reiterate that on this piece of legislation we look forward to the support of the opposition members and perhaps the independent member and any other members who consider themselves independent.

I think everyone in the province will recognize that we not only listened on the Who Does What process, which led us to rethink the whole idea of the education property tax and who should take responsibility for it, but we also listened when the cottage community came forward and said, "We deserve to have the right to vote now."

Mr Wildman: You messed up.

Mr Grimmett: There was no mess-up here. There was simply a change in ideas and a willingness to accommodate our municipal partners and our cottagers. Those are my comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): I would like to split my time this evening with the members for Windsor-Walkerville, Windsor-Sandwich and, if time permits, the member for Essex South.

I want to begin in a somewhat surprising position of actually wanting to agree wholeheartedly with one of the statements made by the member for Peterborough. It may be the first time in the history of this debate that I've agreed with one of the members opposite, but the member for Peterborough said, "There's no need to be debating this bill." I agree completely. There's no need to be debating this bill.

Why are we using the preciously limited time of this Legislature to debate a bill that needs no debate, particularly when the first thing we did in this evening session was to give second reading to Bill 160, a bill which brings about sweeping, fundamental changes to the educational system, a bill which has 126,000 teachers in this province on the verge of unprecedented strike action, a bill which in passing second reading tonight the government has given such provocation to those teachers immediately before they meet with the minister at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning to supposedly discuss a resolution to this conflict, a resolution which is premised not only on major changes to this Bill 160 but to withdrawal of the bill, and yet the government is prepared to be so provocative as to force through the second reading of that bill? We had closure on that debate yesterday. We had a time allocation motion that cut off debate on a bill that was fundamentally important to education in this province and the government said: "No, I'm sorry, we have no time for more debate. We can't debate the really significant things, the really meaningful things."

What were they in such a hurry to do? To save a full sessional day. I realize it's an evening, but by this government's rules this is a new day, and we're using a whole sessional day to debate a bill that the member for Peterborough and I agree needs no debate at all.

You have to then ask the next question: What is this bill that we're spending an entire sessional day on when we should be debating important matters like Bill 160 and the destruction of publicly funded education in this province? What is this bill? According to the document that was handed out by the Minister of Education when he told us he was going to give us this good-news bill, he says it will allow cottagers and other non-resident property owners or tenants to vote for school board trustees in the areas where they own or rent. What a novel idea. I'm sure all the members of my caucus, all the members in the House will be struck by the sheer novelty of this idea. Only when was it that they didn't have the right to vote? When did they lose the right to vote for school trustees? I happen to be a cottage owner in an area that I don't live in. I've always had the right to vote for school trustees. That was a given.

Of course they lost that right when the government passed Bill 104. When was that bill passed? We're not talking about ancient history here. We're talking about a bill that was just passed a matter of months ago, a bill that was just introduced a matter of months ago, and yet here we are fixing the bill.

Then let's take it to the next question. We're now in the process of spending a full sessional day on a matter that needs no debate to fix something that wasn't broken until a few months ago, when the government brought in another major piece of legislation, again a bill on which they cut off debate, brought in closure, didn't allow the kinds of public hearings the public was demanding, denied literally hundreds of people the opportunity to make their views heard, not enough time to debate that bill, but here we are debating a bill that now fixes the problems created by that Bill 104.

It might seem like a small error. Bill 26, the original bully bill that the government tried to rush through this House with no debate at all, let alone any public hearings — I remember there were a number of drafting errors, as they described it, that led to a number of amendments. Maybe this was just a drafting error. Maybe the government just sort of forgot about the cottagers. I think Mr Birnbaum, who was so pleased that the government listened to them and addressed their concerns so expeditiously, might have wondered why the government would forget about all the cottagers' and the non-residents' voting rights, why they would suddenly be so disfranchised.

I don't think the government forgot about them, folks. This was not a small error, this was not a drafting error, and I'm not standing here suggesting for one moment that the government simply overlooked Mr Birnbaum and the cottagers' associations and all the cottagers and non-residents, no, no. What happened in Bill 104 to cottagers and non-residents was very much part of the government's plan. Let's be clear about this. The government knew exactly what it wanted to do. It was in a very big hurry last January to get Bill 104 to restructure the school boards, to get effective local accountability essentially out of their way so they could take total control of education. Of course that's what Bill 160, the one they closed off debate on yesterday, is all about: giving the government total control. The government was in a hurry to get the first part of that control with Bill 104, getting rid of effective school boards, and also to get hold of educational funding. There has been no doubt, from the very beginning, what the game plan of this government has been when it comes to education. They wanted control of the dollars so they could make big cuts.

1930

The only difficulty the government ran into — they knew what their game plan was, they knew what the end goal was, but they just hadn't take the time to figure out that what they were going to try to do to get there wasn't going to work. That's why we're running into not minor errors but fairly major errors. This government intended, you'll recall, to take education tax entirely off the residential property taxpayer. That's why the cottagers and non-resident owners aren't in Bill 104. That's why they were disfranchised, because they weren't going to pay

taxes any longer. None of us who pay residential taxes for education were going to pay those taxes any longer.

We all remember mega-week. I'm sure my colleagues remember mega-week, starting with the Monday of mega-week, the big announcement: "This is the good news that is supposed to get this government re-elected, because haven't we always wanted to get education off the property tax?" The government of course didn't go into a lot of explanation and they still don't like to go into a lot of explanation about the fact that it was never coming off the commercial tax, the business tax. Businesses would still pay for education.

I keep mentioning this because I think it's important that businesses know that they are going to pay their full share of the education property tax as well as all the other costs that the government downloaded to the property tax base on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of mega-week. But Monday was supposed to be the good-news day that was supposed to camouflage all those other downloading announcements that followed for the rest of the week. Monday was the day we were going to take education off the property tax, but if you read the fine print, you knew it was residential property tax. Oh, dear.

I think it's fair to say that it did take the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance a little bit longer to change their minds on this one, to realize their mistake and do their turnaround. It took them a little bit longer on this one, maybe a month or so, if memory serves me, than it did for the Minister of Education to change his mind, as the member for Peterborough says, "to fix his mistakes." The Minister of Education fixed his mistake on extending the school year in a very quick period of time. He announced it Monday and changed his mind on Wednesday. It was good for education on Monday; it was bad for education by Wednesday.

It took them a bit longer to realize that their big mega-week plan — their revenue-neutral plan that would let them take education off the residential property tax and still not have any increased costs downloaded on to municipalities' property tax base — just wasn't going to work, that the numbers didn't add up.

It took them a little while longer to acknowledge the fact that it was at least $1 billion short of being revenue-neutral. It took them a little while longer to hear people like David Crombie say: "My God, you cannot put all these social services on to the property tax base. You certainly can't put long-term care on to the property tax base." So they backed off that. Then, of course, what they discovered was: "Gee, if we've made some mistakes about what we're offloading on to the municipalities, if everybody says, 'You can't do this,' and we've got to retreat from that, then we're into an even bigger problem trying to take education off the residential property tax. I guess we'll have to retreat on that too."

Then they said: "Okay. We won't take all your taxes for education off your residential property. We'll just take 50% of it off." Then they had a dilemma. It's taken them a few months longer to find out the dilemma they've been creating for themselves, because this cycle of mistakes just compounds itself. It took them a little while longer to realize: "You know, if residential property owners are now paying property tax for education, we've just disfranchised all those cottagers and non-residents. We're going to have to give them back the right to vote for school trustees."

So here we have tonight Bill 158. In case you think I'm exaggerating, let me read again from the minister's statement: "The province and the municipalities have already agreed that starting in 1998, the province will assume half the education costs paid by residential and farm property taxpayers, not all of the costs, as originally proposed. However, since non-resident ratepayers will continue to pay some education property tax, it follows that they and their spouses should be able to vote for local school board trustees."

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Who will have no power.

Mrs McLeod: I'll get to that, I tell my colleague from St Catharines, about whether this is really going to be effective local accountability through their vote.

But I want to note the fact that the members opposite have all talked a great deal and seem to hunt for those rare examples of where they can talk about the government having listened. They are rare examples, so I understand why the members opposite work so hard to try and highlight one if they can find one. They say: "We listened to the cottagers' association. We heard their concerns and we've acted with Bill 158." It was not difficult to find an entire group of people who, through the sheer mismanagement of your entire plan, you had managed to disfranchise. I can't imagine it was so hard to find a group of people to listen to on this particular issue.

The issue that members have talked about tonight is the high principle that there shall be no taxation without representation, and of course we agree. If people are going to be taxed, they must have the vote. That's the whole principle behind our democratic system.

Let me be absolutely clear, then, that there is no doubt that cottagers are going to be taxed. They are going to be taxed for education and they are going to be taxed for all those new costs that have been downloaded on to the municipal property tax base. If we could ever get some numbers from the government, it would be interesting to see just how much tax cottagers are going to pay.

I suspect there are a number of rural areas where there is a lot of cottage country and a lot of those cottage owners who now have the right to vote for school trustees because they are now going to be taxed for education, where we'll find that a lot of those cottagers are going to see very significant cost increases through their tax bill for things like policing. While I certainly agree that the cottagers should have the right to vote for school boards, the cottagers might want to have a great deal of concern about how large the tax bill is going to be now that they have the privilege of paying a portion of their education tax as well as all their downloaded costs.

We also have to raise the question about whether they are really getting taxation with representation. In fact, this

is not a question just for the cottagers; this is a question for every individual who is going to be voting for school boards. Quite clearly, although we are going to be paying taxes for education as residential property owners, cottagers or otherwise, the local school board, the people we actually vote for, is not going to be levying those taxes.

There is only one body that is going to be raising the taxes for education, and it isn't the school trustees whom the cottager can now vote for because of this bill; it is the government. In fact, I'll make it a little bit clearer, a little bit narrower. There is only one small group of people that is going to make the decisions about educational tax, because that again is set out in Bill 160, the bill we cut off debate on yesterday. The one small group of people who will decide what our educational taxes are going to be is the cabinet — not even the members who have spoken tonight on the importance of no taxation without presentation; it's the members who are in the cabinet.

1940

I've been a member of cabinet and I don't think it's breaking any secrets to say it's not usually democratic majority votes that rule decisions in cabinet. It comes down to the Premier of the province, maybe with a little help from the Minister of Finance, but ultimately the buck stops in one place, and the decision about educational taxation will be made exclusively by the Premier. So I would suggest that the only people who have any real representation for education taxation are the people who vote for the man who becomes Premier and sits in that seat, if Bill 160 passes. I question whether there is any real representation for taxation when this Bill 158 is immediately preceded by the vote on Bill 160 that gives those kinds of taxation powers to the Premier of this province.

But I do want to just ask another question, and that's why the government keeps wanting to advertise its mistakes, why it wanted to come in to this session, take time away from big issues that we should be debating, and talk about its mistakes. Are they so desperately anxious to cut off debate on Bill 160 that they wanted to spend a whole evening talking about this major mistake they made, this mega-plan they had that backfired because their numbers didn't add up, this group of people they disfranchised because they weren't able to do what they set out to do in the first place?

I could spend the next hour, if I didn't have colleagues waiting to speak, talking about this government's mistakes that they've had to fix, government in a hurry: the bully bill from a bully government, Bill 26, the original bully bill, the bill that allowed municipalities, in the initial draft, to raise head taxes, a poll tax on every citizen. The Minister of Municipal Affairs, who presented that bill, said: "No, no, the opposition's wrong. There's no way that my bill does that." Then he had to amend the bill because he found, maybe to his dismay and maybe to his surprise, that the bill did indeed allow municipalities to raise poll taxes. I think of other parts of Bill 26, mistakes: the fact that the government had to amend that bill because it was about to take away the confidentiality of people's most personal medical records. Was that a mistake, or was that just something that they got caught trying to do?

I certainly know that the overall Bill 26, that bully bill, was part of the government's big agenda, its big plan, its plan to take control, in that case primarily of health care. We've seen the way this government, in a totally undemocratic way, has taken control of the health care system and the restructuring of health care and invested its authority in this supposedly independent commission.

We saw the way Bill 26 prepared for this downloading that has dumped all these extra costs on to the property tax base. We again saw in Bill 104, which this bill tonight is supposed to fix, the effects of government in a hurry. We saw parents who came to our committee on Bill 104 over and over again say: "Stop. Take time to get it right. You can't do things this sweeping this fast. Step back. Let's look at this. Let's look at what you're doing to local boards. Let's look at what you're doing to local accountability." But the government was in too big a hurry to get it done to hear what those parents said, so they didn't step back, they didn't take time to get it right, and we got Bill 104. We have boards which are basically going to be buffers for government policy, particularly if government now passes Bill 160 and takes over the ability to control not only education taxes but virtually every decision that goes on in a school.

Cottagers and non-residents are being given the opportunity to vote for school trustees. I wonder how many school trustees we're going to get a chance to vote for. We know how many people theoretically, but how many individuals are going to put their names forward for school boards? What we're really giving to cottagers tonight is an equal opportunity to vote for boards of trustees if anybody runs for them.

I just saw a story from Hamilton that said five of 36 incumbent trustees are seeking re-election. At this point in my home town, only three people have indicated they are going to run for the school board. I think in Ottawa it's something similar. So this may be a somewhat dubious franchise that cottagers and non-residents are getting tonight. It will be dubious if there are not people putting their names forward to run for school board, to have the chance to vote for them. I think it's going to be a rather dubious franchise too that what we're giving cottagers is an equal opportunity to vote for local boards that will have no local accountability, none whatsoever, between Bill 104, which creates huge mega-boards, and Bill 160, which takes away any power those boards once had.

But I don't think any of this is a mistake. I think it is all part of the government's mega-agenda. The fact that there are parts of it that don't work is a reflection of a government in too big a hurry to get on with its real agenda. It's real agenda is a massive power grab, particularly in education, a power grab in terms of control, a power grab in terms of total takeover of the funding so they can make the cuts they need and then ultimately turn over the control of education to charter schools, turn over the control of education through vouchers and essentially privatize public education. Those are huge issues today, the agenda

of this government for education. Those are the issues we should be debating tonight, not a bill that, in the words of the member for Peterborough, "needs no debate at all."

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I'm glad to have the opportunity to join this debate. I see this bill as another fix-it bill, another bill designed to correct an error that was made, a bill that substantively doesn't impact a lot on education in this province, but when taken in the context of the broader education debate going on today, when we look at Bills 104, 158 and 160, we see not a government committed to improving education but rather a government that has no sense of education, a government that has no understanding of what is going on in the classroom, let alone what goes on with children.

I too would rather have used the time tonight to discuss things in other pieces of legislation. I too would like to talk about illiteracy in this province. I would like to talk about the pupil-teacher ratio, a ratio that in far too many classes is too high. I would like to talk about standardized report cards. I'd like to talk about making our education system better. I'd like to talk to the teachers about that, because the teachers in my riding and the teachers right across this province probably care more than most about those issues.

Yes, there will be points of departure, there will be issues upon which you don't agree, but we ought to open the process. We ought not to shut out the professionals who have given their lives to educating our children, just as we ought not to shut out parents and students from this debate and the debates around the other pieces of education legislation that are so important.

Earlier today we received literally hundreds and hundreds of letters from teachers in our ridings in Windsor. I have letters here from Michelle Norman at St Angela school, from Phil Gava of the Windsor Roman Catholic Separate School Board, from Chris Adam at Catholic Central, from Fran Hall at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and hundreds of others. The common theme, the common message is: "Let's talk about education. Let's make our system better. Let's make it serve our students better, but let's talk about it together, and let's work through the problems together. Let's not force solutions that aren't aimed at improving classroom education but, rather, are aimed at cutting money out of schools' budgets and at taking money out of our classrooms."

I found it ironic last year when the government put its capital freeze on spending in schools, terribly ironic that at precisely the time this government was freezing capital to Ontario schools, in the United States they were committing to a program of capital expenditure, in western Europe they were committing to programs of capital expenditure, bringing schools into the latter part of the 20th century, making sure that our students have the tools to learn, to become prepared for the new century.

This government's narrow education agenda, which has nothing whatsoever to do with quality of education and has everything to do with cutting expenditures, cutting budgets, has to be put to an end. This bill is testimony to the tomfoolery of this government, a government that could pass a bill with such a glaring error. Why? It's that whole too far, too fast, "Gotta get it done" thing.

Earlier today we talked about Bill 136, we talked about the retreat. We talked earlier in the House today about court rulings around Bill 26, the bully bill, and what that has meant. We see a government that's less committed to good public policy than it is committed to jamming its will through without the opportunity for meaningful discussion.

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You know, I've had the opportunity in the last week to meet with the heads of student councils of all the schools in my riding. This weekend I will be meeting with the parents' councils from all the schools in my riding. I will be meeting this Friday with the teachers' federations from my community. I can tell you that the one thing that parents, students, teachers agree with is that this government has no vision of education, no sense of responsibility to our students and no idea of how we will provide for a quality education, not only this year but in the years to come.

I challenge the government, as you're reviewing Bill 158, as you're fixing a huge mistake that you made in 104: Consider fixing the biggest mistake of all — consider withdrawing 160. Consider putting money back into our schools so that when I go to my son's school in the morning, I don't see classrooms with 40 students or 44 students. Consider investing in the technology that poorer students don't have access to today.

You know, there's a real disadvantage that none of us has addressed in this Legislature because we've been too busy talking about tax cuts, we've been too busy bullying teachers, too busy bullying educators. Let's talk about illiteracy, let's talk about the issues that are important, and most of all, let's give up a backward agenda in education and look to the future and not only not cut, but let's be prepared to spend more money on education and not say that we're afraid to. Because if we fall further behind, and this government's been pushing us behind, if we get pushed further behind, I fear we'll have trouble catching up.

Your education agenda won't work. You're going to lose the next election because you don't have a comprehension of the importance of education to everybody in this province. Don't withdraw this bill, don't just amend 104. Withdraw 160, do it quickly, and let's talk about really making Ontario's education system the best in the world. Let's involve teachers, students and parents right across the province.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor-Sandwich): Tonight I find it ironic that we would be speaking about a bill that does in fact impact on education, but Bill 158 and not Bill 160. This government brings in Bill 160, what they call massive reforms to education — and we agree — the largest changes that have been made in one fell swoop such as Bill 160. But we don't have the opportunity to discuss it as we'd like because the government insists on shutting the system down. We're busy voting on time allocation instead of being able to speak about the kind of effects that we see in Bill 160.

My colleague from Windsor-Walkerville was right when he said all of us have been receiving literally hundreds and hundreds of letters, from teachers in my riding, people who are truly concerned, who took the time to write and say, "We're amazed at the kind of changes that are being brought forward that we haven't had a part in, that we've been left out of." I will be able to read just a couple of those examples of comments from teachers, people who I believe, when you work your whole career and, for most, your vocation, in the area of educating our young, are very expert and should be brought into the discussion about how to make the system better.

But as we've said, the Liberal caucus position is clear: We are opposed to this government's destruction of a good, quality, publicly funded education system.

Bill 158 is nothing but one more example of governments running amok. You have tried to move so quickly, so fast without thought, that this is just an "oops" bill, as the member from St Catharines calls it, because you made mistakes and now you have to come in and try to fix it.

We don't know from one week to the next what this government is going to come up with. Starting in January of this year, your big downloading week, it was all education tax off property because you said you were going to do that, even if it didn't make sense. But then a week or more later you decided to change that and only take half of the education off the property tax. Because, what, you listened to AMO? If in fact you had truly listened to the municipalities out there, they would have said, "Don't make the kind of swaps you're proposing." But you went ahead and did that anyway, and now we're looking at the dumping of public health, of social housing, of welfare on to property taxes.

They all told you, "Don't do that." Your own Minister of Housing said publicly that he is opposed to putting social programs on the property tax bill. He says that's not the place for them. Then the interviewer of the day said, "What on earth are you doing?". "Well, you know, we've got to do something."

Quite frankly, you're moving in completely the wrong direction. When you go back home to your ridings, Conservative MPPs, your own civic leaders are telling you you've done the wrong thing. Your own civic leaders are saying, "You know, while the going is good, we won't notice it, but boy, when things start to turn, and they surely will, as they have over decades, your local municipalities aren't going to be able to cover those social costs." Coming from a city like Windsor that sees that kind of cycle far more rapidly than anywhere else, we are very much aware of that, and we in Windsor always knew that this was the wrong thing to do.

The kind of education changes you're making really are all just a façade for the gutting of a public education system. That's what you're truly after. We know all those right-wing reformers over there: Your intent is to privatize the education system. We see you for what you really are. I just wish you'd have the nerve to stand up and say that in fact is your mission here. We know you want to introduce some kind of voucher system. You want to so gut the public education system that all your middle-class voters are going to say: "Jeez, that public system won't be for our kid. No, no. We're going to privately fund our kids and send them to those private schools." What do you leave for the rest of us, a ghettoized public education system just like happened after 1976 in that famous referenda legislation in California? It was the birth of charter schools.

Teachers out there understand. I've gone out of my way to explain this link between what seems to be an innocuous piece of information concerning referenda and the demise of public education. Is it fully your intent to come forward with referenda legislation so that you can ask the people of Ontario, so that you won't raise provincial taxes unless the people of Ontario give you the permission? You know they won't because you, as the government, are going to institute it in such a way that you will control the question? All the research tells us that when you control the question, you control the outcome of the question too. So when they don't give you permission to raise taxes, you have the perfect excuse: "We can't properly fund education because you, the people, won't let us," and hence we have fertile ground for the development of a privatized charter school system in Ontario, one to which I am completely opposed.

So here we are today talking about a cottage tax bill on education, and members of the other side have already said why we would spend an entire sessional day, which this evening now is, discussing this bill when we could be talking about real issues of real concern in education, about Bill 160. When, in the history of Ontario governments, have you had 24,000 people marching to the Gardens in Toronto, telling you, "We don't think you're doing education change the right way"?

I want to take you to the letter from Mary Jane Finn, who says very clearly: "Working with our young people is becoming more demanding, but I'm a professional who cares deeply for my charges. The changes being contemplated will only make my job more difficult, without providing any benefits for the boys and girls in my classroom." I agree with Mary Jane.

We have a letter from John Couvillon, and —

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke-Rexdale): Is that written on board letterhead?

Mrs Pupatello: No, actually it isn't. It's not written on board letterhead. It's written in their handwriting, because they took the time to write it. I wish you would show the people who take the time to give you their opinions at least some level of respect for taking the time to speak to us.

John Couvillon tells us, very interestingly, "Before undertaking such massive change in education, I still do not see that your changes are significant educational changes as much as they are structural and systematic." He goes on to say, "Instead, all of your actions have been threatening, degrading and dismissive of teachers and the teaching profession." This is to the Minister of Education: "It appears that you are bringing your negative feelings towards your own former teachers into your mandate as

education minister. This is unfair to all education and makes a farce of the position of Minister of Education of Ontario."

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I always did have some level of respect for a minister of the crown. When you see this kind of behaviour, that a minister would stand up and lay blame at the teachers' feet, the people who have been out there in the trenches — I don't know how many MPPs remember the Take Your MPP to School Day. When I went into my riding, I had to start at 7:30 in the morning and attend breakfast programs, not run by volunteers in the community but run by teachers, because that school in inner-city Windsor didn't have volunteers to come in at 7:30 am and run a breakfast program. You had to stay until 6 o'clock at night because that's how long the coaches were there.

This government wants to talk about cutting preparation time, without recognizing what the real role of a teacher is, not just in the classroom but in the life of a student, in the life of the school and in the entire school community. Not one committee is run without a teacher-adviser, whether that's student council, whether that's girls' athletic association or boys' athletics, whether it's your Kumon math. Whatever it is in the school, every one of those activities is matched with a teacher. They simply wouldn't happen if you didn't have teachers who were prepared to be there for those kids because they know it makes a difference in the school life of that child.

To date, this government has cut $533 million from public education. What have we seen in the child task force that we've taken around Ontario? The effects of your education cuts on children because all those so-called soft supports in the system are gone. You want to cut preparation time for these same teachers, preparation time that was used in many instances to try to recoup the loss of other supports no longer available in the education system, like the speech pathologists. We brought people in the House here just last week, young children diagnosed with autism no longer getting speech pathology from the board of education. Why is that? Because the position was cut, because the school board had no more room inside the education mandate to fund it. This government cut those services and those children simply aren't getting the kind of supports they need — real children in real need.

It may be okay when we say we've got really smart kids and they don't need special attention. That just isn't the reality any more. Children who are special and need special attention — it's not according to income levels any more; it's according to the level of support they get at home. Abused children come from families of all income levels. Broken families are at all income levels. Children bring these dynamics into the classroom. That makes the teacher not just a teacher; it makes the teacher a psychologist, a speech pathologist, a family counsellor. These kinds of things deeply affect a classroom.

You want to take away the special aids for kids with disabilities. You want to take away all those special supports in the school board, but you're going to do it with a face that says, "But our classroom sizes will be smaller." That is a farce. No one believes it. Parents who call me don't believe you, because they've already seen what you've done to education.

You've been a government for two years. You have not made a commitment to quality education. You cannot go in the back room, some boys' club somewhere, and talk about what you're really going to do to those teachers, boy, and then get your minister on his feet in this House to talk about the fact that he respects teachers. You can't have it both ways. You're either for the education system or you're not. Everything you have done to date proves to me that you are interested in one thing, and that is privatizing the system.

All these discussions are for naught, because it is not your intention to provide every child in Ontario with an equal playing field, and that, friends, is absolutely dead wrong.

Mr Crozier: I welcome the opportunity we have this evening to speak to Bill 158, the Education Voting Rights Act. The reason I appreciate the opportunity is one that I alluded to earlier this evening, and that is the right to stand up in this place and debate, the right to express the opinions that are expressed to me by the constituents in Essex South.

I think back to earlier this year and Bill 104, the Fewer School Boards Act. If at that time the government had listened to the debate, if they had listened to what we were telling them our constituents wanted related, they would have understood at that time that it wasn't the right thing to do to take the rights of certain property owners away from them. Why were they doing that? The reason given at that time was that the provincial government was going to take all education tax off property.

I think back to the by-election in 1993 that I was in and the subsequent general election in 1995. Time and time again, people at the door have agreed that education tax should not be on property. There was a move to do that. The government found, for whatever reason, that it was not able to, so after having first said they were going to and promising people they were going to take all the education tax off property, they then had to turn around and go back and say, "We're only going to take 50% of the education tax off property."

In a twisted way I'm surprised this government didn't say, in its logic, "If we're only going to take 50% of the education tax on property, perhaps we should then only give people half a vote." That's the kind of thinking that it appears to me has gone into some of the legislation this government has put before us. It's the way they just steamroll ahead, not thinking what the consequences are, and then when they find out what the consequences really are, they say, "Whoa, we've got to back up and correct this."

I still think the basis of some of the problem is the fact that they don't take time to listen. When you take time, you have that opportunity to avoid some of these mistakes. Frankly, we all know that's what debate is all about.

We come to this Legislature as the official opposition or Her Majesty's loyal opposition in order to hold the

government accountable. I know that bothers some of the members opposite. Probably it bothers some of the members who are newer to this Legislature, like I am. They think: "We have the majority. We don't have to listen. We'll just tolerate the time that we give those on the opposite side of the House."

But frankly, in a democracy, I think it's just as important to have an opposition that holds governments accountable as it is to have majority governments in the first place. The basis of all that is the time to debate. I think those rights of debate, that advantage of democracy, has been challenged in this Legislature. It's been challenged because the rules have now been made so tight that we don't really have the opportunity to express the feelings of our constituents in the way we should, as I mentioned earlier this evening in a very short two minutes of comments.

When the rule changes came in, one of the excuses given, one of the reasons given, was that it would give more members more opportunity to debate. They emphasized the "more members"; what they didn't say was, "But we're going to give you a lot less time to say it." Then we come along on a bill like this, where really, had they listened in the first place, we wouldn't even be here this evening debating this particular bill. Rather than limiting debate on Bill 160, rather than cutting off any debate on Bill 160, we could have been here this evening debating much more important issues.

I, for one, agree that this particular bill is necessary. I agree that it goes almost without saying that if you pay, if you're taxed for an important part of our provincial responsibility like education, of course you should have that opportunity to vote. So I agree with the government in restoring this.

But I did have to chuckle just a little bit when a couple of the members said, "We listened; that's why we're restoring it." For God's sake, it's their democratic right. Nobody should have needed to tell you that this is the right thing to do.

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The right thing to do extends even beyond an innocuous bill like this; it goes to the very heart of what we've been talking about over the past few weeks. As a matter of fact, this evening, as you well know, Mr Speaker, under a time allocation motion we voted on third reading of Bill 136. I can't recall, in the municipalities I represent, having seen in the past lawn signs pop up for anything but yard sales and elections. But I've seen all across the riding lawn signs saying, "Stop Bill 136." It's the first time I can recall seeing it in the time I've lived in Essex South, and, as one of my colleagues said earlier, that has been a long time. Why are they putting those up? Because they understand that because of the time allocation, because of the limiting of debate in this Legislature and the limiting of the time that you go out across the province to listen, the only way to emphasize that democratic right is to say simply, "Stop Bill 136."

Then we dealt with another time allocation, Bill 160.

One of the hallmarks of a government is how they listen, how democratic they are, how they treat minorities. By minorities, I mean as much those smaller groups of people who don't agree with them. I'm concerned that this bill is not so much a restoration of democracy as we might think. As I said, it's just the right thing to do.

Bill 160 was about education as well. In fact, there was the original Bill 104 about the reduction of school boards, which caused this, and we have Bill 160 and this Bill 158, all tied into education. The education minister gets up and stands here day after day and says: "I'm listening. I think that on one hand we have the best teachers in the world" — although we've had to force him to say that, literally, because there have been other things said by the Premier, for example, that he didn't trust teachers, he didn't trust school boards. We had to almost force him to say we have the best teachers in the world. We all knew that. They didn't have to berate teachers time and time again.

Mr Bradley: It's a wonder he didn't call them hula hoops. That's what he called the nurses.

Mr Crozier: Yes. The nurses were called hula hoops because hula hoops go out of style. I'm glad he didn't call the teachers that, because they certainly deserve a great deal more respect than that.

But the point is, Teacher — oops — Speaker. I'm trying to read notes and think at the same time.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming): It's pretty tough, isn't it?

Mr Crozier: It is tough. There; now I'm back at the right place.

He didn't have to tell us that we have the best teachers in the world; we know that. Then why it is that on the other hand he has to go out and beat up on all these teachers, I have no idea. There has been ample opportunity to speak with the teachers, to meet with the teachers, to get some consensus in all of this debate. He didn't have to bring them to the brink, and that's where we are tonight with the passage of second reading of Bill 160: We are at the brink.

Teachers don't want to strike; teachers want to teach kids. I was in Queen of Peace school last week reading to the grade 1 and kindergarten children. They're dedicated teachers. You just have to look at the school room, the way the material is on the walls and the way the rooms are decorated, you just have to listen to the teachers, the way they communicate with the kids, you just have to look at the students themselves, to know we have the best teachers in the world. Why we would bring them to the point we have, I can't understand.

But this Bill 158 is at least a bill that's going to fix something that's wrong, and it's for that reason that we can certainly support the bill.

I'm just going to take a few minutes. I got a note from across the way signed, "A friend," when I was talking about lawn signs going up. It says, "I understand that after you were elected a lot of For Sale signs went up." Well, no, that wasn't the case. Actually, people in Essex South begged me to stay, because we have to do something about this government.

Enough said. I support this bill because it fixes a wrong. I just wish this government would listen more in other areas to correct some wrongs.

Mr Ramsay: I'm pleased to offer a very small contribution to this debate tonight. I must be frank with people watching the members in the House. We all have varying degrees of interest in different topics, as we represent very different constituencies. Up until tonight, I hadn't been that familiar with Bill 158, and I can see why.

It says here in the order paper today that the bill is "An Act to amend the Education Act...." But as many of my colleagues have said — there have been some great speeches from the members for Windsor-Sandwich, Windsor-Walkerville, Essex South and Fort William before me, and I'm pleased to be able to be in that company — it goes on to say what these amendments are: "to allow for non-resident owners or tenants of residential property to vote for members of district school boards and school authorities."

This government likes to put the titles of its bills in plain language, and really the plain-language title of this bill would be "An Act to correct all the stupid stuff they passed in Bill 104," because that's really what it is. We shouldn't even be here tonight to have to do this at all. This is the latest legislation correcting legislation that we just passed a few weeks ago. The reason for this is that in just about everything the Harris government touches, they're dropping the ball.

The reason — and many township officials in my area have explained it this way, especially with regard to the restructuring, and that's what this is, another type of restructuring bill — is that the government is trying to restructure the whole province of Ontario and they don't even have a blueprint. They don't even have a plan. They don't know where they're going. Woe betide the poor officials who are representing us at the local level, who are working hard trying to keep our school boards together and our schools running, to keep our municipalities together and running. They don't know from week to week and day to day what the latest missive is coming down from Queen's Park as to how they are to run their particular organization in the next year.

Supposedly today, I believe through courier, all the municipal clerk-treasurers and administrators in the province got the very latest financial figures from the Minister of Municipal Affairs as to exactly what the new offloaded costs are going to be to all our municipalities. Now we're just three months away from year-end. Most municipalities today prepare their budgets way before the new year, and only now do they have these figures. We haven't really heard confirmation or any verification that they have these figures as of this time, but supposedly they're on the way and we're finally going to know what percentage our local property taxes are going to go up.

It has been a real challenge for our local officials; the same with the school boards that are trying to restructure themselves under the very hurried deadline of January 1 of next year. Again, it's less than three months before all this is going to happen, and here we are again throwing another bill at them to correct some of the errors the Harris government made in Bill 104.

Education has certainly been the topic of the week. As was mentioned by some of my colleagues, at 6:30 this evening we voted on second reading of Bill 160, the education amendment act that is going to really affect classrooms. I know the people out there watching are very aware of how upset our teachers and principals are, and to some degree school board trustees, about the changes happening in Bill 160, so they should be alarmed, because what this is really about — I'm not sure it has been articulated in this way, because most of us say this has been about money and about controlling the money that goes to education, but what that boils down to is that this is about power. This is about who runs the education system.

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Traditionally, our education system has been the most democratic form of any governance we've had in this province. As our pioneers cleared their way through this country and this province and cleared the land, one of the first things they built with those logs was a schoolhouse, because they knew if their children were to prosper they had to build a school and they had to have some governance of that. They had to pool their resources and hire a teacher; the teacher would come into the area and usually live right in the basement of that house. It was a very frugal operation and it was local people who ran that school. It was really the first democracy we had.

We've come a long way from that; some people would say in some cases very well and some good has come of that, and in some cases maybe we lost some of that original essence of that very closely localized governance of those schools.

But now we've done a 360-degree turn, a complete about-face, in that this government, the provincial government, is taking total responsibility for education out of the hands of local people. It was going to fund it totally also and then decided, mid-course, not to do that. That's why this bill is necessary, because now there is supposedly going to be some local taxation power from the new local super-boards.

Of course that is all going to be dictated from Queen's Park. Mike Harris, with maybe some consultation with cabinet, is going to set the mill rate for half the revenues raised on the property tax for education. That's going to be set for the province on our property taxes, which up till now have only been in the jurisdiction and the control of our locally elected politicians. So they should be, because it's the locally elected politicians who run our municipalities and school board that really are the closest to us all. They really understand the saying that all politics are local. They deal with local issues. They live in the locality. They don't travel out of the locality to come to the capital seat of the province and work, as we do. They really are part of the community; they live and work there and they really understand the importance and the great responsibility they have when they levy a mill rate against the value of our property.

Mike Harris is taking away quite a bit of that and is going to levy at least half of that on our property right from Queen's Park, right across this province. That's a big change, without any consultation.

Getting back to my analogy that the government has done this without a blueprint, not only has it done it without a blueprint, it didn't even talk about its plans with the municipalities and the school boards. Yes, they said in the last campaign that they were going to restructure government, but they didn't say they were going to download many of the responsibilities that up till now had been under the control of the provincial government, that they would download those responsibilities to our municipalities so that those municipalities now have to scramble around to raise extra revenue from our property taxes to pay for those services.

The real objection I have to that is that property taxes don't necessarily reflect the ability to pay. Unlike an income tax, which really is a progressive taxation system based on the income a person generates and therefore one could say it is fair, the property tax system is not necessarily fair, depending on people's idea of how much value they want to put in their home or how much they can afford to put in their home, or maybe, in the case of a widow who finds herself in the family home, unable to sell that home but having to carry the expense through local property taxes.

It's really not the way to go. In fact, all the experts the Harris government put together on the Who Does What committee said that was not the way to go, that you should not be taxing property for education and for social services. But that is the way this government has gone, and we find, because of their great haste and speed, that tonight we have to correct one of the previous pieces of legislation, which was only passed two months ago. Here we go again, and I don't doubt at all that this will not be the last piece of legislation we will need with which to repair much of the damage the Harris government has done to the fabric of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Questions and comments?

Mr Wildman: I want to congratulate the Liberal members for the presentation they made with regard to Bill 158. As they indicated, we are now having to rectify errors made by a government that is bulldozing through and moving forward at great haste very complex pieces of legislation and as a result making very serious mistakes.

I find it a little bit odd that the government members who have spoken in this debate would go to great lengths to argue that they have listened to the public and are responding to the concerns and defending the principle of no taxation without representation, when what they're really doing here is trying to fix a problem that they themselves caused. It is something like the Minister of Education telling the teachers: "Look, you shouldn't be upset with Bill 160 because I threatened to take away the right to strike, I threatened to remove principals and vice-principals from the bargaining units, I threatened to make it possible for people to teach who are not members of the teachers' union. I didn't do those things, so therefore you should be happy." It's like telling someone, "I'm going to destroy your home, I'm going to bomb your place," and then afterwards, when you decide not to throw a bomb but just to break a window, you say: "You should be happy. It's okay. I only broke a window; I didn't destroy your home, so don't be unhappy." This is a government that screws up and then doesn't admit it.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Simcoe Centre): I stand here today to respond to the comments of the opposition party with respect to Bill 158. I would say to start off is that what we're dealing with here is the right of non-resident taxpayers to vote, primarily cottage owners. In my riding of Simcoe Centre, that's a welcome feature. We have all kinds of cottagers in the area: Big Bay Point, Alcona Beach, LeFroy and Gilford. When you listen to the points the opposition was trying to make, it was a lot of — well, I wouldn't say gobbledegook, but it was a little bit off the point.

We're talking about Bill 158, and the bill essentially is Education Voting Rights Act (Cottagers and Others), 1997. It's allowing non-resident ratepayers, primarily cottage owners, to vote for trustees in a November school board election. What's objectionable about that?

The member for Windsor-Walkerville said, "It was a mistake to take education off residential property tax." The member for Fort William said, "It's a mistake to give the province responsibility to fund education." The member for Windsor-Sandwich made the comment, "It's a cottage tax bill on education." What do these comments have to do with Bill 158?

The bottom line is that the province is responsible for funding education. The bottom line is that this is not a tax bill; this is a voting bill. These people also have the right to vote with respect to school board trustees in their principal residence. They're being allowed an opportunity to vote in their cottage area and also in the area of their principal residence. I think this is a fair bill. There are no mistakes in this; this is strictly a bill about fairness.

2030

Mr Bradley: What everybody is concerned about this evening is the fact that the government had a sneak vote on Bill 160 tonight. Most people were anticipating that that would come either in the afternoon, when normally we have the Orders of the Day, or I think most people were probably anticipating that we would have had that vote after the Minister of Education met with the teachers.

So here we have a situation tomorrow where representatives of the teaching profession will be meeting with the Minister of Education to discuss the provisions of Bill 160, the mammoth education bill which is designed to remove over $1 billion more from the education system, to allow people without qualification to teach in the system, and to tamper with many of the rights which have been part of the collective bargaining process over the years. That's what we have.

We had that vote tonight at approximately 6:40 to 6:45. I don't know anybody in the province who knew it was coming except members of the Legislature midafternoon

this afternoon. Here the government goes again, involved in a sneak attack. I think that is not going to be well received. I hope people overlook that as a slap in the face to the people with whom you're going to negotiate.

But here we have a meeting taking place tomorrow. We hope there's goodwill on the side of the government. We know there's going to be goodwill on the side of the representatives of the teaching profession at this meeting, but they're going to be confronted with a situation where the government, with a closure motion choking off debate, has already rammed through second reading of Bill 130. I think most of them would have preferred us to be debating that legislation this evening, as my colleagues have pointed out.

Ms Martel: I want to begin by saying that I appreciate the comments being made by the Liberal members who said this Bill 158 restores — "restores" is the key word — the right of cottage owners to have a vote for school trustees in the next election. I have to ask the government members who are here tonight, do the government members understand the words, "bungled," "messed up," "screwed up," "blundered," "botched"? Because that's the position you folks find yourselves in here this evening. This is what this bill is all about. In your haste to ram through Bill 104, the Conservative government took away the right of cottage owners to vote for municipal trustees. That's what you did a few short months ago, and we find ourselves in the assembly tonight putting through a bill, second and third readings, to allow people to continue to have the right you took away.

I find it a little bit insulting for the government members to call on the rest of us to vote in favour of this bill. We were always in favour of allowing these folks the right to vote. You were the people who took that right away. You were the people who disfranchised cottage owners because of your rapid changes to Bill 104 which were not thought through, and clearly here are the consequences. It reminds me of Bill 26 and a whole host of other bills that you people are so intent on ramming through. Afterwards we find all of the mistakes and here we are tonight trying to fix it.

Some of the members have also said, "The government listened." Well, folks, you didn't have a choice, did you? You were the ones who took away cottage owners' right to vote. We're here tonight trying to fix your mess. If anything, the whole lot of you should have got up and apologized. You sure should be embarrassed about the position you find yourselves in tonight.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Who's going to sum up for the Liberals? The member fort Fort William.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. The clock is stopped. Order, please. Member for Fort William.

Mrs McLeod: I appreciate the comments of all the members. The member for Sudbury East ends where I began with my comments, which is that this bill is here simply to restore a right which the government did indeed take away. As the member for Sudbury East emphasizes, it was a blunder, a mistake. I want to re-emphasize the fact that this was not a minor mistake, this was not a casual overlooking of cottagers. This was a major mistake on the government's mega-plan which was fated not to work from the very beginning.

The member for Simcoe Centre has asked what our comments about taxation and educational funding control have to do with this bill. This whole bill is here because you have to restore representation because you've got taxation. "No taxation without representation" is what your minister and your members have said. I would suggest that it's equally important that we establish a principle of no taxation by regulation because this same government has another bill, Bill 160, that establishes a principle which is so anti-democratic, that all taxation for education will be determined by cabinet. There is no taxation with representation when you've got taxation by regulation. It is unprecedented.

The members have said, "This is a bill, after all, about local accountability." As the member for Timiskaming has said, this bill does nothing to fix the major mess that was created by Bill 104 and the restructuring of local school boards, which essentially, combined with Bill 160, takes away all real local accountability and disfranchises every one of us when it comes to voting for the local school board.

The members of the government caucus have also said, "This bill is about democracy," so we addressed the issue of democracy. As the member for Essex South said, if you're going to address the issue of democracy, let's begin by getting more democratic in this place and not bringing in legislation which denies us the right to debate education from now on.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Wildman: I want to rise to participate in this debate and indicate that I will be sharing my time with my friends from Cochrane South, Sudbury East, Hamilton Centre and Dovercourt — cottagers all.

Bill 158 is entitled An Act to amend the Education Act to allow non-resident owners or tenants of residential property to vote for members of district school boards and school authorities. I suggest that this is a misnomer. The bill actually should be entitled "An Act to amend the Education Act to restore to non-resident owners or tenants of residential property the right to vote for members of district school boards and school authorities, a right which was removed by the Harris government."

Mr Christopherson: What's the short title of that bill?

Mr Wildman: The short title is "Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa."

The government of course has messed up and we're here this evening to help them fix it up, to resolve a problem. As usual, the opposition has to come together to assist the citizens of this province to rectify the problems that the government has visited upon them.

The government rushed through a bill called Bill 104. Under that bill, they changed the school board boundaries in the province and significantly reduced the number of school boards so that we now have, particularly in

northern and rural Ontario, enormous geographic boards which are completely unworkable and which will mean that many, many communities will not have any representation at all on school boards. Of course now with Bill 160 the government is finishing the process in which they have taken essentially all power, all control, all authority and all accountability away from local school boards, so that these large school boards for which these non-resident property owners will now again be able to vote will not be able to do anything. They will not have any power, any control or any influence over the education in the local communities

I found it a bit much, though, as I listened to the government party members who participated in this debate — I think the member for Middlesex, the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, the member for Peterborough and the member for Simcoe Centre — who at one time or another all got up and defend this legislation as if it were a great democratic move on the part of the government —

Mr Baird: So did I, Bud.

Mr Wildman: Oh, the member for Nepean just thanked everybody for their cogent comments, as I recall. But these other members all defended the legislation on the basis that it was a great act of democratic generosity by the government because they were extending a new right. Any of us who understand history understand that the right to vote related to property ownership is older than the general franchise. Originally, in order to vote, people had to own property. It's only later that each individual member of the public got the right to vote. This is one of the oldest rights we have had in this system. This government chose to deny it to people, to take it away, to remove it, to disfranchise cottage owners who, as I understand from the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay, actually pay 80% of the cost of education in his area.

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The justification the government used in Bill 104 for removing this right from these seasonal homeowners was that they were going to take over all of the cost of education, 100% of the cost of education, and therefore, since the people didn't live in the community and they would no longer be paying property taxes for education, the argument was that they didn't need the right to vote.

The other thing I found interesting was that the government has tried to blame the Association of Municipalities of Ontario for this. They said it's their fault, that they asked for this. Of course, what happened was that when the municipalities saw the magnitude of the download that this government is dumping on them with regard to all the other services that are being transferred to the municipal level of government, all the costs involved, they said: "Hey, wait a minute. This isn't acceptable. You've got to keep some of these at the provincial level." So when they had to go back into negotiations with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the government had to back off and back up. They said: "Wait a minute. Okay, we will not now transfer all the cost of education to the provincial government. We will only transfer 50%."

Mr Baird: We're listening too much.

Mr Wildman: The member says they're listening, but the interesting thing is that when they took 50% of the cost of education back to the provincial level, did they restore any power to the local authorities? The members I mentioned have defended this on the basis of no taxation without representation, but the point is this: If these property owners were really to have the right through the ballot box to influence the amount of taxes they are going to pay, they would have to be given the right to vote directly for the Treasurer, for the Minister of Finance, because it is the Treasurer who from now on, thanks to Bill 160, is going to determine how much tax they pay. It's not going to be the local school board. They're being given the right to vote for the school board, but the school board won't have the right to set the mill rate. The school board is not going to have any say over how much tax they pay.

This is a hollow right that is being restored. This government is centralizing control over the cost and expenditure for education at Queen's Park. Interestingly enough, it's not even the Minister of Education and Training who is going to control it; it is the Minister of Finance. Why? We know why. The Minister of Finance — I've used this analogy before — is like the guy in the Hollywood movie Jerry Maguire who's an athlete. He keeps yelling at all his other colleagues in the cabinet: "Show me the money. Give me the money. I want the money. I want to give a tax break and you've got to give me billions of dollars in order to do it." The Minister of Education and Training, Mr Snobelen, is I guess Jerry Maguire in this analogy. He says: "I'll get you the money. Just don't drop me as your agent."

The Minister of Education and Training has tried to justify his moves in education in Bill 104, Bill 158 and Bill 160 on the basis that he wants to improve the quality of education for students. It's not true. I think he's mistaken. I think he actually believes that's what he's going to do, but I'm not certain he actually believes it, because it's hard to tell with Mr Snobelen.

The fact is this: The government is taking complete control over education. They're trying to do this because they want to get as much money out as possible. These taxpayers are going to be paying taxes, 50% of the cost of education, but they're not going to be getting very much of anything out of this. They're not going to get any say over how much they're going to be paying in taxes, because the Minister of Finance is going to set the mill rate.

They're not going to have much influence over how school boards spend the money they have, because most of the control over questions around the organization of schools, who teaches in the classroom, what they teach, how they teach and when they teach will be set by regulation under Bill 160. The teachers, who are central to providing quality education to students, and the school boards will not be able to negotiate the learning conditions for students, they won't be able to make decisions around how money is expended, because most of those decisions will be made centrally.

It is beyond my understanding how a party that claims to be in favour of local autonomy, that claims to be interested in having as much accountability at the local level as possible, would be moving forward on this agenda in education. They are centralizing control throughout the system. They are taking control away from the trustees; they are taking control away from the parents; they are taking influence and bargaining rights away from the teachers. With this bill and the others, they're even taking away control from the group they tend to argue they listen to the most, the taxpayers, because no matter how they try to cut it, this bill is not going to give cottage owners any influence over how much tax they pay on their properties towards education. That's all going to be decided here at Queen's Park by the great Pooh-Bah of finance.

It's unfortunate. I think this government is on a completely wrongheaded course with regard to education and education finance and governance. This bill does not rectify it. It simply tries to get around an embarrassment that this government has caused itself without doing anything for the property owners it purports to assist and without doing anything for the students who are central and the main reason for education.

I just want to close by explaining one of the problems boards find themselves in now. The Durham Board of Education, which has been congratulated around the world as one of the best boards of education in the world, is one of the first boards to approve its budget for next year. It's very difficult for boards to approve budgets, because they don't know what the funding formula is yet. The government hasn't told them what the funding formula is. But the Durham Board of Education moved forward, and because they don't know what the funding formula is for next year, they had to do it on the basis of what they did last year.

The problem that Durham had, though, was that they were moving forward on the minister's announcement in January. The minister announced in January that the provincial government was taking over 100% of the cost of education funding. At that time, the Durham board believed they would still be able to set the mill rate, but they decided not to impose a mill rate increase on local taxpayers but rather to use their reserves. What did they want to use their reserves for? They decided to use the reserves, which they had built up over the years on the basis of the taxes they had collected from the property owners in their area, to save junior kindergarten.

Ms Martel: Why did they have to do that?

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Mr Wildman: They had to use those reserves because this government had cut the funding for junior kindergarten.

As a responsible group of trustees, serving on what has been deemed by a German foundation that has surveyed boards around the world to be the best in the world, in serving their students and their ratepayers, they decided to save junior kindergarten. But because of that, the ratepayers in Durham are suffering. They are losing because this government doesn't want boards to use their reserves, so they're being penalized by this government for doing that. They will probably see — I don't know this for certain — a situation where they are going to have to see an increase in the mill rate now because they cannot fund junior kindergarten along with enrolment growth.

This is what this government is visiting upon the ratepayers. This is a government that doesn't really know what it wants except money out of education. This is a government that says one thing one day and does something else the next in the education of our students. This is a government that wants to centralize all of the control over education governance and finance at Queen's Park, wants to make it possible for the government to make regulations on things that have always been under the purview of school boards or subject to school board-teacher negotiations in the past on the basis of what's good for their students. This is a government that does not believe in education; all it's interested in is getting the money out.

It's about time the Minister of Finance stopped shouting at Mr Snobelen, "Show me the money." It's about time Mr Snobelen, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Finance and all of the government ministers rethought the education direction they're involved in, sat down with the teachers, the trustees, the parents, the students and all those interested in education and designed an agenda which will properly serve the students and ensure them a quality education.

We're willing to help the government out to rectify the problems they caused by hurrying Bill 104 through without proper thought. We're prepared to restore to people the basic right to vote that this government took away, but the government members shouldn't have the gall to get up here and try to claim that they're doing something that is worthwhile and useful and good. What they're doing is simply trying to rectify an error they made because they were prepared to bulldoze things through simply to get as much money out of education as possible.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I rather enjoyed the comments by the member for Algoma, our House leader, because I'm going to pick up from where he left off, and that is that the government quite frankly made a mistake. I'll tell you this is about the third or fourth occasion in the last two weeks that we as opposition members have had to come back in this House and help the government yet again fix another one of their blunders. I don't mind doing it; that's the job we're paid for. But I think the use of the House and our time here as legislators could be better spent if the government were to get its act together and if the government would just for once try to do things right.

I hear the line that they're going too far, too fast, yet another example. It's not too far, too fast; this government yet again went in the wrong direction. They took away the rights of cottage owners to vote in a municipal election when it came to their school trustees. Why? Because they had a thought at the beginning. It was a novel thought. They said, "We're going to remove property taxes

altogether from the municipal rolls." They made a mistake. I don't think they really ever had the intention to do so but they ended up making changes in Bill 104 that would have taken away people's right to vote, because they wouldn't have had to pay municipal taxes, and whoops, they slipped up again. They've had to charge people taxes, when it comes to property tax, for education, and here we are once again having to come back into this House as members of the opposition and help the government fix yet another mistake.

I just want to make sure the Minister of Education has a bit of a lesson here, because I think the Minister of Education needs to get a bit of a lesson on a couple of things. It was very clear yesterday when we were at the rally at the Maple Leaf Gardens and here yesterday in front of Queen's Park that a lot of people in Ontario are really beginning to believe that John has got problems, that the minister needs a bit of a lesson. So I want to share with the minister today that there's a thing called a thesaurus. If he's not sure how it's spelled, it's t-h-e-s-a-u-r-u-s, and it's Roget's second edition Thesaurus. If you take a look at it on page 642 —

Mr Wildman: Beauchesne.

Mr Bisson: Beauchesne. Good one, Bud. Roget's. Anyway, touché, as they might say.

If you take a look at page 642, it talks about the word "mistake" and it basically has some other pretty interesting words you can use to replace it. Some of these were mentioned earlier by the member from Algoma. The word "error," "miscue," "slipup," "blunder," "stumble," "trip-up," "ball-up," and I'll let your imagination wander from there.

Interjection: Did you say "screwup"?

Mr Bisson: Oh no, I didn't say that. I couldn't say that in the Legislature. It is not in keeping with the decorum of the House.

I finished looking at the Thesaurus and I though that maybe it's a problem of the ministers of the crown that they don't understand what a mistake is. Maybe we should try to tell them there are other words that maybe they do understand, in their limited vocabulary, and we can use those words here in the House to point out that maybe they're having problems. If you don't understand the word "mistake," you probably know what the word "error" means: "Miscue, to slip or to slip up, to stumble, to trip up, blunder, snafu," all of them mean the same thing. You messed it up.

If you pick up the dictionary — now a dictionary, John, you know what that is? They have them in classrooms all around Ontario.

Ms Martel: Not any more.

Mr Bisson: I have to be corrected yet again.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Cochrane South, take your seat a moment. I have to remind you that you cannot refer to the members by their first name or even their name. You must refer to them by their seat.

Mr Bisson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister Johnny. Very good. Thank you very much. The Minister of Education —

The Acting Speaker: Member for Cochrane South, no, you can't do that, please.

Mr Bisson: Minister Mr Snobelen. Anyway, as it was pointed out, there are not very many more dictionaries in classrooms around Ontario because of the $800 million the government has already pulled out of our public and Catholic separate school system of education, and yet another billion dollars. Can you imagine, Minister Snobelen, how few dictionaries we're going to have in Ontario? But I found one. There is one here in the assembly. We're fortunate because we have books, the things with words in them. Just go around the corner. There is whole bunch of them and you can read them.

It's an interesting thing: I picked up the dictionary and I found that there is quite an interesting dialogue on the word "mistake," because it really comes down to four different categories. The first category of "mistake" reads as follows in the dictionary, page 779: "A mistake, grave or trivial, is caused by bad judgement or disregard of rules of principle." Is that what happened here? Is this bad judgement and a bad rule of principle? We'll get back to that, but there's another one.

You can use the word "blunder" for "mistake" and it is defined, on page 779 of the dictionary, as: "A blunder is a careless, stupid or gross mistake in action suggesting awkwardness, headlessness or ignorance." I wonder which one Minister Snobelen falls under when it comes to this particular definition.

You can go further, again on page 779, and under the word "mistake" it says: "An error. A mistake is an unintentional wandering or deviation from accuracy or the right conduct." Do you think maybe that's what it was? Do you think it was a deviation or wandering? We do know that the minister tends to wander in blaming teachers all the time.

Mr Peter L. Preston (Brant-Haldimand): When it comes to big words.

Mr Bisson: Yes, words. Those are those things with more than three letters that you learn in books and you put them together and they make words.

The last one on page 779 under "mistake" says: "A slip is usually a minor mistake made through haste or carelessness." The question we have to ask ourselves is this: Which of the four definitions do we want to take?

Ms Lankin: I vote on both "slipup" and "blunder."

Mr Bisson: We have votes on "slipup" and "blunder." There are four categories. These are your choices, and I'll end on this point because we have other members who want to speak: We have "mistake," which is bad judgement or disregard for principle. We know the Tories are supposed to have principles, so can we see hands? Yes, Minister, you're on the "bad principle" one. We have you duly noted. Then there is "blunder: a mistake because of ignorance." Premier, no? You're not with me? Not "ignorance." Okay. Then we go on to "blunder" — oh, I already did "blunder." That was our favourite here in the caucus. The other one is "error: wandering or deviation from accuracy," because it's an error in judgement or it's a slipup because they moved too fast.

The point is, you guys made a mistake and we're having to come back into this assembly one more time to fix your mistakes because you cannot get it right the first time, the second time and every time.

We are pleased to be here in this assembly tonight, as members of the New Democratic Party, yet again to help this government fix up yet another one of their mistakes. We will assist the government to make sure the people's right to vote, when it comes to property owners who own seasonal lands and seasonal cottages or buildings, are able to vote again in municipal elections for their school board trustees.

I leave it up to you: Which one of the mistakes is it?

2100

Mr Christopherson: It's actually a rather fascinating evening to sit and watch this majority government, a group of people who take such delight in using their majority to ram things through at lightning speed, listening to no one other than themselves and their own key advisers at the end of a rope, twisting as you are.

I have to confess that were you not trying to offer up this feeble argument, which I don't hear being heckled across the floor nearly as much any more — you started out the evening talking about: "We made this change because we were listening. We made this change because we care. We care about making sure people have the rights they deserve under the democratic system." The reality is —

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: It's got to be working. We're hearing "Yabba dabba doo" finally this evening.

The reason, of course, that you had to offer up this excuse is because you couldn't bring yourself to say, "We did screw up." This happened as a result of a change in policy, a flip-flop we would call it, but you could straight up call it a change in policy, and as a result of that change you've got to go back and make another change.

But no, you didn't do that. You had to come in here and talk about this glorious thing you're doing for democracy. Meanwhile, it's been in the law and on the books for, I don't know, decades. The only time this right that's being restored tonight was threatened was when you took it away under Bill 104. That's the only time it was ever threatened.

You can appreciate that we find it a little galling that you come in and try to cover off where your polls are showing you clearly that you've got some soft spots in terms of listening — because you aren't — that you want to say you're making this change because you're listening to people. The only thing you're listening to is the roar of outrage from cottage owners who had a right that you took away, and as a result of your policy flip-flop, they're left out in the cold.

Mr Bisson: They're not happy campers.

Mr Christopherson: My colleague from Cochrane South says they're not happy campers. They're not happy cottagers, this is true. They're very upset.

What is truly ironic in all this is that the rights you're restoring are already gone, because the power to tax that trustees once had is about to be eliminated under Bill 160, the other bill you're ramming through under a time allocation the same way you did Bill 104 that took away this right in the first place. These trustees whom you're restoring the right of cottage owners to elect can't set the mill rate any more. You've taken that power away from the trustees.

Politically, you've still got to respond to the roar that's out there, but it will occur to people at some point that they really lost everything, not just under 104 but more importantly 160, because there is no longer any taxation with representation in terms of trustees. That power is now all vested in the cabinet. Therein lies a fundamental shift.

If I can be a little more serious for a moment, it's interesting — it's been mentioned by others and I find it particularly fascinating, having served municipally — to see a group of people come to power who have steadfastly said, "The government that's best for the people is the government that's the closest to the people." On every single measure where you've been downloading, your cover for that has been, "We want the local elected people to make the decisions." You've done that in numerous cases. Yet on this issue, a fundamental, large part of the responsibility of provincial governments, education, you are involved in Bill 160 in a massive shift of power, almost total, away from local elected trustees to you; centralizing it, back to the larger government, the senior level of government.

You even go on to insult the trustees by saying that trustees and teachers can't be trusted to manage the education system. I want to tell you that yes, they've made mistakes locally. What government hasn't, as you've proven so fully this evening? But I will say this much on behalf of the citizens in my community and in my riding: They trust the teachers and the elected school board trustees a hell of a lot more than they trust you to make sure there is proper funding for our education system. They trust them a lot more than they will ever trust you. That's assuming, of course, that we're not back here in a couple of months amending something else that involves the education system that you've screwed up because you rushed it through so quickly.

I'm going to end on this note, two quick points: One is that it is true that we are helping you fix it. I'd be surprised — pleasantly, I might say — to hear any of you admit that. The fact of the matter is, at a time when relations between the opposition and the government couldn't be any worse — discussion at the House leaders' meeting level is all but in the ditch; there is no negotiation of how this place manages any more — as a result of your changes, your shutting down a lot of the rights we had previously in this House as opposition, under your rules changes, has left us no choice. As a result of that, there isn't the kind of cooperation that would give the people the kind of Legislature they're entitled to because you denied yourselves any right to that kind of cooperation when you did what you did to the opposition.

We believe this has to be fixed too. We could have forced this government, as you well know, into a much

longer process had we wanted to, but that would have made the wrong people pay the price. So this evening we have agreed that we will do second reading tonight and third reading. By the designated time of the House adjourning, we will have second and third reading under our belt, and other than the rubber stamp of the LG, de facto this is passed and your mistake is fixed. Not one of you to this moment has been big enough even once to say, "Yes, we created this problem when we took it out of Bill 104 because we changed our policy, and on behalf of the people whose rights are being restored, we thank the opposition for their cooperation." It wouldn't have taken much more than that, but a little bit of honesty and a little bit of humility would have gone an awful long way, especially from a government as arrogant as you've been. Believe me, for every twist of the knife you're getting on this screwup of yours, you've earned every bit of it and that much more.

2110

The last thing I want to say is it's interesting that when the government wants to talk about how long the House goes on, and sometimes about how much it costs when we've fought for democracy, not one of you stood up and talked about how much it's costing the taxpayers — we haven't either because we don't see it that way — to run this House to fix your screwup, one you haven't even got the decency to stand up and admit was yours in the first place.

Ms Martel: I'm going to start by following up on a point that was raised by my colleague from Algoma, who is the critic, who talked about what the title of the bill should really be. If you look at the explanatory note that outlines what this bill is about, my sense would be that should be changed. It says, "The purpose of the bill is to allow a person" — allow a person, as if a person didn't have this right already — "and the spouse of that person, to vote for members of a district school board or school authority for an area in which the person owns or is a tenant of residential property even though the person or spouse does not reside in the area."

If you read that note, you would be left to assume that somehow we are granting some brave, new, democratic right to cottage owners here this evening and, my, oh, my, shouldn't we commend the government for being so progressive? We are here tonight, and this is the irony of why we are sitting here tonight, to restore the right of cottage owners to vote for school trustees because you took that away.

Three government members this evening stood up and read speeches that were probably written by the same person who wrote Bill 104 and took the right away in the first place and tried to tell the rest of us how pleased they were to participate in the debate, as if they were extending some new thing to people across the province. For goodness' sake, be big enough to admit we're here tonight trying to fix your mess.

That's why we're sitting here at 10 after 9 on the night of October 7, because we're trying to fix the blunder, the mess, the screwup, the mistake, the error, which you made. The reason this government made the mistake in the first place, and the reason we're here fixing it tonight for you so that people might have some semblance of a vote again but I'm going to speak about the irony of that too, is because, as always, this group was in a big hurry to ram Bill 104 through this House. You were in a big hurry to ram through the bill so you could find some savings from education to help finance your tax cut.

In the process of ramming the bill through, like usual, you forgot some of the very important details, some of the very important items. This is not a minor mistake. Because of your blunder, because of your haste, because you don't pay attention to details, you folks took away the right to vote for thousands and thousands of cottage owners across the province. That's what you did. That's the irony about what we're doing here tonight. We're spending precious House time trying to fix a major mistake where you folks disfranchised thousands and thousands of Ontarians from having what should be a legitimate, long-respected, historical right to vote for trustees.

The second irony is that, even though we're here tonight trying to help you restore the rights you took away through Bill 104, at the end of the day, even after we do that, this government, through another piece of legislation, which you're trying to ram through this House too, will in essence make that both null and void.

I heard government here this evening talk about the principle of no taxation without representation. What a joke, because Bill 160 does not allow for no taxation without representation. What we will have when Bill 160 is passed by this government is the Treasurer of the province now setting the mill rate so that local trustees, local taxpayers — be they residential, be they seasonal property cottage owners — will have absolutely no say whatsoever in terms of the taxes that are paid for education.

This Treasurer, behind closed doors, through regulations, in a centralized office here in downtown Toronto, is going to have all the authority, all the power to set that mill rate. While we are here trying to fix your mess, we also very clearly recognize, and I hope that people who are watching tonight recognize too, that it's a false promise, a false hope, and frankly a false vote that we're here tonight trying to restore, because you folks are still intent on trying to take away people's right to vote, on trying to take away people's right to have some say over the taxes they're going to pay.

Bill 160 effectively nullifies everything we are trying to do here tonight because people will have no representation; they will not have a say in terms of the mill rate. Local politicians, local trustees, parents who are concerned, teachers who are concerned, will have absolutely no say in terms of what that mill rate will be. Not only that, given all the other changes in Bill 160, many of those groups will have virtually no say in how education is run in this province. That too is being centralized behind closed doors, this time in the office of the Minister of Education.

We're here because we're dealing with the consequences of a government that in its haste, because they were trying to take money out of the system, didn't pay attention to the details, didn't pay attention to the important points, didn't listen to people, barged ahead, rammed forward, stomped on people, and stomped in essence on their right to vote, took that away, disfranchised them. We're here trying to fix that.

But we're here also dealing with the government's flip-flop when it came to education, because this group went out in January and announced to the public that they were going to cover 100% of the cost of education raised via the property taxes. This group was going to cover that in exchange for any number of other costs around social services and soft services and some hard services to be downloaded onto municipalities.

Then the government, as the government has been wont to do over the last couple of months, found that was not going to work, that they hadn't paid attention to a lot of the details of that or the important points of that either, and the government had to come back to this place and then announce that, oh, no, they were only going to pay for 50% of the cost of education. Still a large number of services, hard services, soft services, new social services were going to be downloaded on to the local property taxpayer. We're dealing with their mistakes, we're dealing with their flip-flops and we're trying to fix some of that tonight.

What was so interesting was to listen to the government members this evening try and tell the rest of us that they hoped we would support this bill. That's an insult. Do you think we don't understand what's happening here tonight? Do you think the public doesn't understand that we're here trying to fix your mess? Don't insult us, don't insult the intelligence of the public by trying to suggest that we should do the noble and proper thing here this evening and vote in favour.

We're going to help you by passing this bill tonight, second and third reading. But it would've been nice to hear at least one of you say: "You know what? Oops, we made a mistake; we messed up, we screwed up; we made an error; we botched this; we bungled this. We're going to do the right thing for a change and we're going to fix it." No, instead I heard tonight, of all things, government members trying to say that they listened to the public, and as a consequence of listening to the public we are here tonight and we're going to respond.

Let's face it folks, you didn't have a choice, did you? You had no choice but to respond because you were the ones who took away the rights in the first place. Of course you had to listen to what cottage owners told you and give them back that right to vote. This had nothing to do with listening and being open-minded. This has nothing to do with trying to ensure that the fundamentals of no taxation without representation are respected. This has nothing to do whatsoever with trying to encourage the rest of us in making us see your point of view and voting in favour tonight.

It has everything to do with us spending time here tonight, once again trying to fix one of your mistakes, because you were in such a hurry to grab money through Bill 104 that you forgot the important details. We're living with the consequences tonight and are going to fix it for you.

Mr Tony Silipo (Dovercourt): I'd just like to indicate at the outset that our colleague from Beaches-Woodbine will also be sharing in the balance of the time because, as my colleagues have said, we are trying to be cooperative this evening.

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth): Do we have a choice in that?

Mr Silipo: Yes, you have a choice. The choice is, either we do that or she speaks in the next round of debate; that's the choice, I say to my colleague opposite.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Speak now.

2120

Mr Silipo: I hear, "Speak now." We will try and do that in the next 15 minutes. As I was saying, and as my colleagues before me have said very, very clearly, we are trying to be helpful this evening because we recognize that the government has really screwed up royally on this one.

I think it bears repeating that we would've expected a little bit of humility — I think my colleague from Hamilton used that phrase — from the government members opposite, instead of the kind of ongoing macho attitude that we see: coming in here pretending they're giving people a right. Technically they are, because right now these people don't have that right. The reason they don't have that right, as has been ably demonstrated by my colleagues tonight, is because the government took it away.

Mr Preston: Over and over.

Mr Silipo: My colleague says, "Over and over." Of course. That's what happens when you bungle like this: You need to be reminded of it. Tonight we're the ones who have the opportunity to do that. More importantly, the public out there is doing it day in and day out.

I just hope the government will also come to the realization that they are screwing up big time when it comes to the broader issue of education, let alone the rest of the agenda they are embarked on. Because we know that in Bill 160 — which, by the way, we voted on on second reading earlier tonight — lies the new vision for education that John Snobelen and Mike Harris have for this province: one in which the control will be in the hands of the Minister of Finance; one in which school boards will have virtually no right to make decisions locally, to cater to the needs of local communities; and one in which the whole object is for the government to take $1 billion out of the system.

We know the minister is meeting tomorrow with representatives of the teachers' federations. I only hope, for the sake of our school system, that the smugness, the intransigence, the rigidity, the arrogance that we have seen so far from this minister and this government has some room left for some change.

Mr Wildman: The way they've acted tonight is not encouraging.

Mr Silipo: I would agree with my colleague from Algoma when he said that the way they have acted tonight doesn't particularly encourage us, because if they can come in so smug on this issue, then God help us, and more importantly God help our school system, when it comes to the broader issues of funding and how decisions are going to be made.

Time will tell, but time will also ensure that people understand fully the agenda of this government, an agenda that is based on keeping the one and only fundamental promise that Mike Harris seems intent on keeping, and that is the 30% tax cut, for the sake of which everything, including destroying our school system, seems to be fair game for this government.

That's what this is about, because in the haste that they have made decisions and in the haste that they continue to make decisions, they will make mistakes like they have made on this one, of taking away a basic right to vote for a group of citizens across the province. So we're here tonight having to pass a bill, which as we've indicated we'll cooperate in passing, to restore a right that people have had in this province for generations. That's the lesson that is in this, but so far I don't hear the government learning that lesson.

We can only hope that somewhere in the realms of the government some realization is beginning that they can't keep making decisions in this way, because when you do, one of the things you end up doing is exactly what you've done in this instance, which is to take away people's basic rights, the rights that are at the heart of our democratic system — the right to vote. Can you believe that? The right to vote was taken away because of the decision this government made for thousands of people across the province. Here we are tonight reinstating that right.

It's our job to remind the government of the mistakes they are making, but more importantly, it's our hope that the government comes to the realization that they can't keep governing in this fashion because in the process people get hurt, services get dismembered and the basic structure of our society gets altered, to the point where we don't recognize any more the good things that we have managed to build in this province and in this society. That's what's at the heart of what the government is doing. They need to fundamentally understand that what they're doing is wrong and that people out there, more and more, are understanding and are saying to them, "What you're doing is wrong."

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-Woodbine): I am going to keep my remarks unusually short because we have committed that we are going to pass this bill on second and third reading tonight in order to correct the mistake of the government. This government, on a continuous basis, uses everything to do with the legislative process here in the most, I think, objectionable way as part of a communication spin for their government. Thus the name of the bill tonight: An Act to amend the Education Act to allow cottagers to vote. You note that it doesn't say "to restore" the right to vote.

I want to point out another bill though, Bill 7, which repealed previous labour legislation that gave rights to workers. That bill that repealed and took away those rights, introduced by this government, was an act to restore balance and stability to labour relations and promote —

Interjections.

Ms Lankin: You can take a spin on these things when it suits your purposes, but the worst spin that I've heard is what I've heard from the Premier and the Minister of Education in the last number of weeks that has led to this confrontation which has provoked a situation in this province where we are, for the first time in two decades, on the brink of a province-wide shutdown of our schools that will affect over two million students. I can only say to you, please back off, allow the meeting tomorrow to get rid of the rhetoric, to deal with the issues, to bring some sanity to this.

The one thing that I will finish by saying is that I see very little common sense in the way in which you're handling the education system of this province. What I do see is your revolution. People get hurt in revolutions.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Smith has moved Bill 158. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon David Johnson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to complete third reading of Bill 158 this evening.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed? Agreed.

Mr Smith moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 158, An Act to amend the Education Act to allow non-resident owners or tenants of residential property to vote for members of district school boards and school authorities / Projet de loi 158, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en vue de permettre aux propriétaires ou locataires non résidents d'un bien résidentiel de voter lors de l'élection des membres des conseils scolaires de district et des administrations scolaires.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Middlesex has moved third reading of Bill 158. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

It now being almost 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2129.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma	Wildman, Bud (ND)
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Michael A. (L)
Beaches-Woodbine	Lankin, Frances (ND)
Brampton North / -Nord	Spina, Joseph (PC)
Brampton South / -Sud	Clement, Tony (PC)
Brant-Haldimand	Preston, Peter L. (PC)
Brantford	Johnson, Ron (PC)
Bruce	Fisher, Barbara (PC)
Burlington South / -Sud	**Jackson, Hon / L'hon Cameron** (PC) Minister without Portfolio (seniors issues) / ministre sans portefeuille (affaires des pernonnes âgées)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)
Carleton	**Sterling, Hon / L'hon Norman W.** (PC) Minister of Environment and Energy / ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Énergie
Carleton East / -Est	Morin, Gilles E. (L)
Chatham-Kent	Carroll, Jack (PC)
Cochrane North / -Nord	Wood, Len (ND)
Cochrane South / -Sud	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Cornwall	Cleary, John C. (L)
Don Mills	**Johnson, Hon / L'hon David** (PC) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, government House leader / président du Conseil de gestion, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Dovercourt	Silipo, Tony (ND)
Downsview	Castrilli, Annamarie (L)
Dufferin-Peel	Tilson, David (PC)
Durham Centre / -Centre	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Durham East / -Est	O'Toole, John R. (PC)
Durham West / -Ouest	**Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet** (PC) Minister of Community and Social Services / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Durham-York	Munro, Julia (PC)
Eglinton	**Saunderson, Hon / L'hon William** (PC) Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism / ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et du Tourisme
Elgin	North, Peter (Ind)
Essex-Kent	Hoy, Pat (L)
Essex South / -Sud	Crozier, Bruce (L)
Etobicoke-Humber	Ford, Douglas B. (PC)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Kells, Morley (PC)
Etobicoke-Rexdale	Hastings, John (PC)
Etobicoke West / -Ouest	**Stockwell, Hon / L'hon Chris** (PC) Speaker / président
Fort William	McLeod, Lyn (L)
Fort York	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Frontenac-Addington	Vankoughnet, Bill (PC)
Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)
Guelph	Elliott, Brenda (PC)
Halton Centre / -Centre	Young, Terence H. (PC)
Halton North / -Nord	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Hamilton Centre / -Centre	Christopherson, David (ND)
Hamilton East / -Est	Agostino, Dominic (L)
Hamilton Mountain	Pettit, Trevor (PC)
Hamilton West / -Ouest	Ross, Lillian (PC)
Hastings-Peterborough	Danford, Harry (PC)
High Park-Swansea	Shea, Derwyn (PC)
Huron	Johns, Helen (PC)
Kenora	Miclash, Frank (L)
Kingston and The Islands / Kingston et Les Îles	Gerretsen, John (L)
Kitchener	Wettlaufer, Wayne (PC)
Kitchener-Wilmot	Leadston, Gary L. (PC)
Lake Nipigon / Lac-Nipigon	Pouliot, Gilles (ND)
Lambton	Beaubien, Marcel (PC)
Lanark-Renfrew	Jordan, W. Leo (PC)
Lawrence	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
Leeds-Grenville	**Runciman, Hon / L'hon Robert W.** (PC) Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services / solliciteur général et ministre des Services correctionnels
Lincoln	Sheehan, Frank (PC)
London Centre / -Centre	Boyd, Marion (ND)
London North / -Nord	**Cunningham, Hon / L'hon Dianne** (PC) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
London South / -Sud	Wood, Bob (PC)
Markham	**Tsubouchi, Hon / L'hon David H.** (PC) Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations / ministre de la Consommation et du Commerce
Middlesex	Smith, Bruce (PC)
Mississauga East / -Est	DeFaria, Carl (PC)
Mississauga North / -Nord	**Snobelen, Hon / L'hon John** (PC) Minister of Education and Training / ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation
Mississauga South / -Sud	Marland, Margaret (PC)
Mississauga West / -Ouest	**Sampson, Hon / L'hon Rob** (PC) Minister without Portfolio (privatization) / ministre sans portefeuille (privatisation)
Muskoka-Georgian Bay / Muskoka-Baie-Georgienne	Grimmett, Bill (PC)
Nepean	Baird, John R. (PC)
Niagara Falls	Maves, Bart (PC)
Niagara South / -Sud	Hudak, Tim (PC)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nickel Belt	Laughren, Floyd (ND)
Nipissing	**Harris, Hon / L'hon Michael D.** (PC) Premier and President of the Executive Council / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif
Norfolk	Barrett, Toby (PC)
Northumberland	Galt, Doug (PC)
Oakville South / -Sud	Carr, Gary (PC)
Oakwood	Colle, Mike (L)
Oriole	Caplan, David (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)
Ottawa East / -Est	Grandmaître, Bernard (L)
Ottawa-Rideau	Guzzo, Garry J. (PC)
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Dalton (L) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Ottawa West / -Ouest	Cullen, Alex (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)
Parkdale	Ruprecht, Tony (L)
Parry Sound	**Eves, Hon / L'hon Ernie L.** (PC) Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance / vice-premier ministre, ministre des Finances
Perth	Johnson, Bert (PC)
Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)
Port Arthur	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Prescott and Russell / Prescott et Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)
Prince Edward-Lennox-South Hastings / Prince EdwardLennox-Hastings-Sud	Fox, Gary (PC)
Quinte	Rollins, E.J. Douglas (PC)
Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Renfrew North / -Nord	Conway, Sean G. (L)
Riverdale	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
S-D-G & East Grenville / S-D-G et Grenville-Est	Villeneuve, Hon / L'hon Noble (PC) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
St Andrew-St Patrick	Bassett, Isabel (PC)
St Catharines	Bradley, James J. (L)
St Catharines-Brock	Froese, Tom (PC)
St George-St David	Leach, Hon / L'hon Al (PC) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Sarnia	Boushy, Dave (PC)
Sault Ste Marie / Sault-Sainte-Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)
Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Gerry (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Newman, Dan (PC)
Scarborough East / -Est	Gilchrist, Steve (PC)
Scarborough-Ellesmere	**Mushinski, Hon / L'hon Marilyn** (PC) Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation / ministre des Affaires civiques, de la Culture et des Loisirs
Scarborough North / -Nord	Curling, Alvin (L)
Scarborough West / -Ouest	Brown, Jim (PC)
Simcoe Centre / -Centre	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)
Simcoe East / -Est	McLean, Allan K. (PC)
Simcoe West / -Ouest	**Wilson, Hon / L'hon Jim** (PC) Minister of Health / ministre de la Santé
Sudbury	Bartolucci, Rick (L)
Sudbury East / -Est	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Timiskaming	Ramsay, David (L)
Victoria-Haliburton	**Hodgson, Hon / L'hon Chris** (PC) Minister of Natural Resources, Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Waterloo North / -Nord	**Witmer, Hon / L'hon Elizabeth** (PC) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Welland-Thorold	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Wentworth East / -Est	Doyle, Ed (PC)
Wentworth North / -Nord	Skarica, Toni (PC)
Willowdale	**Harnick, Hon / L'hon Charles** (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Wilson Heights	Kwinter, Monte (L)
Windsor-Riverside	Lessard, Wayne (ND)
Windsor-Sandwich	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
Windsor-Walkerville	Duncan, Dwight (L)
York Centre / -Centre	**Palladini, Hon / L'hon Al** (PC) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
York East / -Est	Parker, John L. (PC)
York Mills	Turnbull, David (PC)
York-Mackenzie	Klees, Frank (PC)
Yorkview	Sergio, Mario (L)
York South / -Sud	Kennedy, Gerard (L)

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Wednesday 8 October 1997

Mercredi 8 octobre 1997

Speaker
Honourable Chris Stockwell

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Chris Stockwell

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 8 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 8 octobre 1997

The House met at 1332.
Prayers.

MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING COMMUNICATION

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege. You will be aware that I've written to you giving you notice of my intention to raise this issue under the new rules requirements.

As you know, standing order 21 is quite clear: "Privileges are the rights enjoyed by the House collectively and by members of the House individually conferred by the Legislative Assembly Act and other statutes, or by practice, precedent, usage and custom."

My point of privilege relates directly to my ability and the ability of all opposition members to serve and to do their legislative duties. I believe my privileges as an MPP have been breached, and I'd like to explain.

You will be aware that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing had promised he would release the figures related to the municipal download on October 6, 1997. Yesterday these numbers were sent by courier to some municipalities across the province. We have reports that some municipalities have received them while some have not. For example, municipalities in the north have not yet received these numbers.

But my point relates directly to the method used for giving this information to members of the Legislative Assembly. Yesterday the municipal affairs and housing ministry delivered the download numbers to the press gallery at 5 pm. Packages were delivered to the legislative mail room at 5 pm for opposition MPPs as well. The mail room, as you know, is closed at 5 pm, so it was impossible for opposition MPPs to access that information at that time. Opposition MPPs were forced to wait until this morning when the mail room reopened to see what the download numbers actually were.

But my staff has been informed that Conservative MPPs got these numbers at 9 am yesterday morning, so it's a full 24 hours between the time members of the government party and members of the opposition received the information. It seems the pecking order as far as this government is concerned is that Tory MPPs get the information first, then some municipalities, then the media, and last opposition members.

The whole process surrounding the release of these download numbers has been confused and I believe inappropriate in terms of the release of information to the members of the Legislative Assembly. If it is appropriate to provide the information to members of the governing party at 9 am on October 6, it is also appropriate to release that information to other members, to all members of the Legislative Assembly at the same time. Obviously it means that members of the governing party could have the information, analyse it and comment on it a full 24 hours before members of the opposition.

I ask, Speaker, if you would investigate this situation to determine whether or not indeed the privileges of myself and all members of the opposition have been breached by this inappropriate approach of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I wonder if there might be consent for the government House leader to respond in a few moments.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): I guess there isn't unanimous consent as you're seeking. I'll reserve until a later date.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): My statement is directed to the Premier and is in the form of a letter from the Kenora Board of Education's parent advisory council. It reads:

"Dear Premier Harris:

"You owe the people of Ontario an apology for the impudent remarks you made on September 30, 1997, while defending your Bill 160. To say 'school boards and unions are not trusted to deliver quality education' is an insult to anyone who has ever served as a school trustee and the citizens of Ontario who elected them.

"Our school trustees, elected at the favour of the voters, have always carried out their duties conscientiously with integrity and prime concern for the educational wellbeing of the students.

"Isn't the natural corollary of your remarks that any elected official should not be trusted? Mr Harris, remember from whence you came.

"We also feel that you should solicit and accept input from Ontario's teachers on an unconditional basis. If your true aim is to better the educational system, input from the front-line troops is essential.

"As Premier of the province we except you to be gracious and humble enough to issue this apology. We await your reply."

Premier, like the parent council of Kenora, parents throughout the province are calling upon you to show leadership on this issue. They are calling upon you to stop the assault on educators and elected school board officials.

Parents in the northwest want you to know that our schools are best in the hands of our students, parents, school board officials and our communities. Decisions about our children's education should be made as close to the community and classroom as possible, not here in Toronto in your and the minister's office.

1340

WINDSOR DAYS OF ACTION

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): Windsor city council has unanimously proclaimed Friday, October 17, as the day of action for those who wish to legally exercise their rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

The Windsor Days of Action committee and the Ontario Federation of Labour have been working hard to ensure the day is a success. I want to congratulate those hardworking volunteers. Forty thousand to 50,000 people are expected to be out to demonstrate against this government's cuts to health care, education, social services, the downloading of costs on to municipalities and its phoney tax cut.

I'm inviting all members of this Legislature, particularly those from Chatham-Kent, Lambton, Middlesex and Sarnia, to come to Windsor that day.

The Mike Harris government is trying to shake its reputation as a government that doesn't listen. Well, here is an opportunity to visit our community and listen to the concerns about health care. Visit Hotel Dieu and Metropolitan hospitals and see at first hand the crisis in the emergency wards and the chronic shortage of beds. Listen to the many families incurring debt and experiencing financial hardship because of the mismanagement of the family support plan. Listen to injured workers express their concern over the gutting of the workers' compensation system. Listen to auto workers, nurses, teachers, social workers and absolutely everyone else, and they will tell you how your cuts are affecting their families, their neighbours and their community.

If you don't want to hear it from me, come to Windsor on October 17 and listen to the people and the message they are trying to send to Mike Harris.

BREAST CANCER

Mrs Barbara Fisher (Bruce): This past weekend a very important event happened. More than 40,000 Canadians ran, walked or jogged to raise money for breast cancer research.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and these participants helped raise more than $3 million for this very important research. I would like to congratulate each one of them on their efforts.

Breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death among Ontario women, with those over 50 particularly at risk. Research proves that early detection among this group of women can reduce the number of breast cancer deaths by 30%. That is why the Ontario government is committed to expanding the Ontario breast screening program. This government has provided an additional $24.3 million over four years to this program. The funding, which began in 1996-97, is to expand the OBSP province-wide and increase capacity at existing sites. By the year 2000, the OBSP is aiming to screen over 325,000 Ontario women every year, increasing the number of breast screenings by 400%.

Our ministry is proud to provide support and funding for groups such as Willow, an organization that provides counselling and support to women diagnosed with breast cancer. What is unique about Willow is that breast cancer survivors provide all the counselling.

Breast cancer does not only affect women; it affects their fathers, their brothers and their sons. We all have an interest in ensuring that a cure for this disease is found quickly.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I want to direct my statement to the Minister of Health. May I say, it is delivered with a strong degree of frustration and anger at a minister who will not accept that his severe cutbacks and restructuring process are harming the quality of health care in my community.

Almost every day we hear the Premier and the minister tell the Legislature that health care delivery is improving in the province. The truth is that they are wrong, they know they are wrong and the people in my community are paying for their stubbornness and gross misjudgement.

Hospital cutbacks and a forced restructuring process have left us in Thunder Bay with too few acute care beds, not enough long-term beds, and lengthy waiting lists for chronic care facilities.

Just today we have learned that 40 beds will now be reopened at Hogarth Westmount to deal with this crisis. But we ask, why did it take so long to acknowledge the need? The fact is that every day I receive letters and phone calls from constituents whose family members are becoming victims of a system that cannot provide the quality of care that we all deserve and expect.

Whether it's a loss of dignity for our seniors and disabled in our long-term facilities, or the time spent in hospital hallways because no acute care beds have been available, or the fact that our doctors and nurses are simply run off their feet trying to help their patients, the situation has become intolerable.

Minister, you've got to recognize that the dictates of your restructuring commission are simply too demanding. You must acknowledge that we need more acute care beds and more long-term facilities. The fact is that you must not

deal with the bottom line, but deal with compassion for those people in need: people today who are frightened and concerned that we now have a health care system that is failing us.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): Since day one, the Minister of Education has said that there is a need to invent a useful crisis in our education system, and he is now getting what he has been looking for all along.

Teachers across the province have already done everything they can to change this government's mind about education changes, but the changes are so undemocratic and will damage education so badly that teachers have no alternative but to launch a province-wide walkout.

Teachers want this government to listen to what they have to say. Teachers know far better than the minister or his colleagues how much preparation time they need to provide a quality education to our children. Teachers know that people without teaching certificates may have very good skills but have not been trained to deal with a class of 40 or 50 children.

Teachers are frustrated and very disturbed by the fact that they have been denied access to the education minister's e-mail. I tried it myself. The message I got was "Access forbidden" — very typical of this government, ramming legislation through without planning, consulting or listening.

The Minister of Education doesn't expect that there will be a teachers' strike. We know that a walkout is coming. As a parent and a grandparent, as a member of this Legislature, I fully support any action the teachers will take to get the message across to this government that we care about the education of our children right across this province.

SATELLITE SERVICES

Mr W. Leo Jordan (Lanark-Renfrew): I recently had the great pleasure of joining in a groundbreaking ceremony in Montague township for the first of two Canadian gateway sites for advanced mobile satellite services. Canacom, in partnership with Globalstar, is investing $15 million in this site in Montague township which will link up eastern Canada with a constellation of 48 satellites and provide international mobile communication services in remote areas.

There will be only two such sites in Canada, with the other being in Calgary, Alberta. This will make Smith's Falls and area a prime location for a call centre for the banking industry. The primary market is customers who travel worldwide. The product includes an affordable array of mobile services such as call forward, call waiting, conference, message and fax transmission.

I was pleased to join the representatives of Industry Canada, the companies, the reeve and the mayor to launch the construction of a high-tech site that will give tourists, international business travellers and people in rural areas first-rate cell phone access.

Most important: It will create 35 new jobs in the riding of Lanark-Renfrew.

BRING YOUR TEACHER AN APPLE DAY

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): The Liberal caucus is designating this Friday, October 10, as Bring Your Teacher an Apple Day all across Ontario. We encourage all students, parents and all the partners in education to bring the teachers in their local schools an apple. This is a very real way for the partners in education to show their opposition to Bill 160 and to show that teachers are important and that education is our future and that Bill 160 erodes rather than enhances the future of education for the students we love and care for.

Bill 160 is rotten to the core, and for the healthy growth of students and the nurtured blooming and maturing of our educational system, it must be drastically altered. Our teachers deserve to have the respect and appreciation of the Mike Harris government, something sorely lacking now. As we enter the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, it affords us a perfect opportunity to count the blessings we have. The students, parents and partners in education can manifest in a very real and tangible way that teachers are special and deserve recognition.

The Liberal caucus encourages all Ontarians to take part in Bring Your Teacher an Apple Day this Friday, October 10, and is happy and proud to sponsor this event. Bring your teachers an apple.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Member for Cochrane South.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): When I do so on Friday, I'll also bring a copy of Dalton McGuinty's private member's bill from 1992, I can assure you.

CLOSURE OF OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): We learned with shock this week that the Ombudsman's office in the city of Timmins is shutting down. For members of this assembly to know what this means, all the people of Cochrane North, all the people of Cochrane South, into Timiskaming and part of Nickel Belt, use the Ombudsman's office as their last recourse when bad decisions are made by the government, their only opportunity to have somebody independently look at what the government has done, to look at whether the process was fair and was followed properly, and if it wasn't, how you redress that.

I'm calling on this government and I'm calling on the members of this House to make sure that the Office of the Ombudsman's budget is adjusted so we can ensure that we keep that office in Timmins in place, that serves everybody from Timmins all the way up Highway 11 to the James Bay coast. If we don't have it, it means that people in Cochrane South and in Cochrane North are going to lose their ability to complain against this government. Maybe that's what the agenda of this government is.

I just want to quote from the yearly report of the Ombudsman, Ms Roberta Jamieson, who I think put it aptly when she said, "It has become a basic feature of our democracy that individuals who believe they have been treated unfairly in the provision of public services have a right of recourse to seek redress." With this decision, we will lose that right in Cochrane South and North.

1350

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRE

Mrs Lillian Ross (Hamilton West): Last week it was my pleasure to attend the opening of the new community care access centre in Hamilton, along with the Honourable Cam Jackson, minister responsible for seniors.

The CCAC is the new coordinating hub for home care and health placement services in our area. The centre will provide residents of Hamilton one-stop shopping for their long-term health care needs as well as acting as a central dispatch for inquiries on a wide variety of services.

The community care access centres were an initiative of this government as part of its move to focus our spending on services to people, but the implementation of the centres took more than government fiat. It took the sincere initiative of hundreds of dedicated employees across the province and a particularly outstanding team at our centre in Hamilton.

Terry Shields, chair of the volunteer board, in her address at the opening ceremony mentioned time and again the "service first" philosophy of the people at the centre. Terry's own words said it best: "These staff will be the backbone of the community care access centre. They will continue to be the lifeline to people in the community who count on them for their caring, their professionalism and their service."

It's initiatives like the CCAC that show how we can do better for people when we concentrate our resources on front-line services ahead of expanding bureaucracy. I would like to extend to the staff and volunteers my sincere best wishes.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on administration of justice and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 153, An Act to provide more protection for animals by amending the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr90, An Act respecting the City of York.

Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill Pr87, An Act respecting the Korean Canadian Cultural Association of Metropolitan Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Introduction of bills? Motions? Statements by ministries?

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent from all parties to allow the Minister of Education and Training to make a statement with regard to the impending crisis of a possible walkout of all the teachers, disrupting the education of students in this province.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent for a statement by the Minister of Education? Agreed? No.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Last week in this House you made a commitment to release your numbers that would show the impact of your downloading on municipalities right across this province. Yesterday, what did we receive? Nothing but a worthless pile of paper that everyone is calling a farce.

Hazel McCallion, the mayor of Mississauga, said she has absolutely no confidence in your numbers. The mayor of Sudbury — remember him? — a former Conservative member, Jim Gordon, said he was disappointed with the numbers. Brampton Mayor Peter Robertson doesn't have any confidence in your numbers either.

Minister, how can anyone believe that your downloading will be revenue-neutral when mayor after mayor right across this province is suggesting that your numbers are nothing but bogus? How can anyone believe you?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It's very interesting. I also saw Mayor McCallion's comments. She hadn't received the numbers yet, but she was convinced that she wouldn't like them.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Minister.

Hon Mr Leach: I can tell the members opposite that there were 815 packages of material couriered out yesterday. Some municipalities got them yesterday and some will be receiving them today. It depends on how quickly the couriers can get them around the province.

The numbers are an expansion of the numbers that were put out on August 6. At that time we gave the upper tiers the numbers. We've now distributed the numbers as to how they can be assigned to the lower tiers. The ball is now in the municipalities' court to tell us how they want to distribute those numbers between the upper and lower tiers.

Mr Cordiano: Minister, what's really interesting is that you, along with your ministry, have no confidence in your own numbers. Why? Because you've created all kinds of loopholes to weasel your way out of making any real commitments. The fine print tells us the real story. Everything is subject to regulations that have yet to be passed and is conditional upon municipalities reaching agreement among themselves. There's nothing in this document that proves your case that this is revenue-neutral. I ask you again to live up to your commitment and release the real numbers. Can we have the real numbers today?

Hon Mr Leach: We not only provided the real numbers, all of the numbers, to the municipalities, we gave them options because there are different ways to deal with the numbers. It depends on how the upper tier wants to distribute the numbers to the lower tier. They can do it by assessment, they can do it by population, they can do it by caseload. Not only did we give them one number, we gave them the three numbers so that they can review those. We're setting up meetings with each one of the municipalities to go over the numbers line by line so they can understand how they were established. We provided the assumptions that were behind those numbers so they can comment on how the assumptions were reached to develop the numbers. All that information has gone to them. The ball is now in the courts of the municipalities to get back to us. When we get the answer back from them, we'll be able to proceed to the next step.

Mr Cordiano: It's obvious, Minister, you can't produce any real numbers because you don't have any. Your numbers are like watching an episode of The X-Files. No one can explain them and they're completely bizarre. The truth is out there. All you have to do is listen to the municipalities. Listen to the mayor of St Catharines, Al Unwin. He doesn't believe your numbers and he doesn't believe you will honour your commitment to the transitional funding you've promised.

I want to ask you, Minister, on behalf of all the municipalities out there, will you guarantee in legislation long-term transitional funding that you claim will make everything revenue-neutral? Will you guarantee that today?

Hon Mr Leach: We've advised the municipalities that the Who Does What exercise will be revenue-neutral. We've stated that a number of times. I stated it to the regional chairs and the county wardens in Sudbury last Sunday and Monday. We've set up the funds that are there to make sure it is revenue-neutral. I think all the municipalities know that when this government states it's going to do something, this government does something. We are known for keeping our promises and this is another promise that will be kept.

1400

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): My question is for the Minister of Education. You appear to be determined to take our students and our educational system into a confrontation that no one wants, that you claim you don't want, yet you have provoked this fight at every turn. You and Mike Harris say, "We'll talk to teacher representatives," and then the Premier says, "But they can't be trusted." You say, "Let's talk," and then you force through the second reading of your education bill the night before the talks are to take place. This morning, you were still laying down your bottom lines. You say you want quality education, but you said again this morning you want it at the lowest possible cost.

Minister, your determination to pay for your government's tax cut on the backs of our children is still driving your agenda. You are picking this fight with teachers so you can get the tools you need to get the money you're looking for. Our teachers deserve better than this fight and our students deserve better than the cheapest possible education. There is still a chance to prevent this confrontation. You have to back off your bottom lines. Will you back off your determination to pay for your tax cut on the backs of our teachers and our students?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for Fort William for the question. We had a meeting this morning. We were able to talk, to present the challenges before our school system to have the best-quality system in Canada.

I can say this to the member for Fort William: You probably disagree with the findings of the Education Improvement Commission that said that for too long we have measured our success in our schools by virtue of how much we've spent, not the results that our schools produce. We believe the way to measure our success in education is by the performance of our students. That's the track we're on. That's why we're committed to making improvements in our school system, to making sure our students have access to the highest quality of education in Canada. That is our first and foremost commitment.

Mrs McLeod: Minister, your agenda hasn't changed. All you are prepared to talk about is how you are going to take money out of education and how you're going to do that by taking teachers out of the education system.

There was a group of secondary school principals here yesterday. One secondary school principal tried to tell you what your plan to use unqualified teachers in our classrooms would mean to her school. She said it would mean 34 fewer teachers in her school alone. She said your plan to have teachers spend more time with students would actually mean about 50 fewer teachers to work with

students. Multiply those numbers for just one school by 5,000 schools and you will very quickly get the 10,000 fewer teachers you've set out to get in the first place.

In that one secondary school alone, you are also going to lose 22,618 hours of volunteer teacher time spent on everything from tutoring to working with students on the school newspaper. Cutting teachers out of the system does not give us better education. It is not better for kids. Will you back off your plan to cut costs by cutting teachers?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let's be very clear. Under the recommendations of the Education Improvement Commission or anything this government has proposed, the vast majority of people in the classrooms of the schools in Ontario will be certified teachers. They are now; they always will be. That's the backbone of our education system.

The question before us and the issue raised by the Education Improvement Commission is how to augment teachers with other experts from other fields who can help in the learning process. That's the challenge that's before us. This morning I was able to talk with the union heads and ask them for their suggestions on how we can do that, how we can meet not only the current needs of our students, but the future needs of our students, and what the protocol should be for having experts back up certified teachers.

I'm looking forward to having the teachers' unions and others provide us with proposals that will allow us to do just that: make sure our students have the best experts available to help their teachers.

Mrs McLeod: I'm holding in my hand a confidential document. It shows this minister's real agenda. It's called "Conversation with the minister." It tells us where you think education should be going, and it doesn't seem to include teachers. You think students should learn by computer. You say you'll have to figure out some role for educators in the John Snobelen classroom of tomorrow. You even want to combine the Ministry of Education with the Ministry of Economic Development. It shows what value you place on education, Minister. It is only too clear from this document that you are going to cut costs by cutting teachers out of the education system.

Your government's willingness to sacrifice public education to your tax cut is truly frightening. Your so-called vision for an education system without teachers is even more frightening. You cannot provide a quality education without qualified, committed teachers. Minister, will you back off your plan to pay for your tax cut by taking teachers out of our education system?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let me be very clear to the member for Fort William. Nothing will ever replace highly qualified, well-motivated teachers in our school system as the backbone of an excellent school system. That's exactly why we are undertaking the kinds of reforms we are in education: curriculum that has exact standards year by year to help our teachers; province-wide, standard report cards so everyone can be clear about how a student is progressing; the reforms and changes that are anticipated under the bill before the House right now to make sure we have funding for all of our classrooms and for all of our teachers right across the province that meets student needs.

That's why we're changing education: to provide more backup for our teachers, because we believe that now and in the future they will be the backbone of the best education system in Canada. Let's be very clear about that.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): New question.

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I have a question to the Premier. I want to take stock as to exactly where your Minister of Education has education in this province headed. Your Bill 160 confirms that you want to replace teachers with uncertified, untrained people in the classroom. Your own government confirms that you want to eliminate at least 4,000 teaching positions. We now have a secret ministry document that reports that you want to try to replace teachers with computers. Your Minister of Education met with teacher representatives today and basically told them to go home and find ways to take money out of the system.

Your Minister of Education has us headed towards a huge confrontation with teachers in this province, and children are going to suffer. It's time for you to show leadership. You met with labour leaders over Bill 136. Will you do the same now with teachers and head off the confrontation?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I'll refer it to the Minister of Education.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Let me be clear to the leader of the third party that we had a meeting this morning. I invited the presidents of the unions to come to a meeting this morning. They did, and we had a chance to discuss the issues before us.

I was able at the start of that meeting to go over the times we've listened to the teachers' federations and unions over the past few months. When they assured us that the right to strike would not ever jeopardize the education of a student, we listened to them. When they said that having principals be part of the bargaining unit was important because principals would be above the fray any time there was a dispute, we listened to them. When they said it was important for the Ontario Teachers' Federation to retain the statutory right to represent teachers because they are professionals and need that sort of body, we listened to them.

So we're building on that record of listening, of being open to their concerns and being able to approach the improvement of education for our students from the point of view of putting people together and listening to what they have to say.

Mr Hampton: My question was to the Premier, because we all know what this Minister of Education has accomplished. He has called students across the province mediocre. He has said they're at the end of the train, the caboose of the train. He regularly goes around the province insulting teachers, and he has marched us into this confrontation.

I asked the Premier a question because it's obvious to everyone that if your government wants to avoid a confrontation in this province, Premier, you have to step in;

you have to show some leadership. Premier, will you do that? Will you sit down with the representatives of the teachers' federations and will you put an end to the kind of confrontation tactics that your Minister of Education has practised? Will you do that?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Perhaps I can give the leader of the third party an opportunity to correct the record, because if he examines the record he will find that we have said that student performance in Ontario is mediocre versus other provinces in Canada and other countries and that this simply is not a reflection of the abilities of our students. We think they're the best students in Canada, and their performance should be the best in Canada. We think our teachers are the best in Canada, and therefore we must give them the backup, the curriculum and the resources they need in order to make sure we have the best system in Canada.

That's what we've said. We've said that time and time again. I have stood in this House, in this chamber, and everywhere else I've been in Ontario and said that Ontario has the best-qualified teachers in Canada and we need to resource them properly so they can do the best job.

1410

Mr Hampton: Let me go back to the Premier again because this is the problem that the Premier has to deal with. The Premier has a Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier who goes to Harvard University and delivers a speech, and in this speech he says, "The greatest strength of our economy is our highly skilled and educated labour force." In other words, he says that one of the reasons we do so well in terms of our economy is because we have a well-educated, highly skilled labour force. Then we have the Minister of Education, who charges around the province and elsewhere and says the performance is mediocre, that people's achievement levels are mediocre.

That's exactly why no one has any faith in this Minister of Education. The Premier goes to Europe and tells everyone we have a good education system. The Minister of Finance goes to Harvard University and tells everyone we have an excellent education system and a well-skilled workforce. Then we've got this Minister of Education who runs it down.

The Speaker: Question.

Mr Hampton: Premier, that's why you have to intervene. No one has any faith in this Minister of Education. No one believes him. No one gives him any credibility. Will you intervene to —

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Snobelen: Perhaps I can clear this up for the leader of the third party. The strength of Ontario has always been a well-trained workforce of people who are well educated. For many years, education was valued in Ontario. However, under your government, sir, with fuzzy standards, with fuzzy outcomes, with no commitment to the performance of our young people in systems where you measured our success by how much you spent, not how well our students did, that has deteriorated.

This government has been working hard and continues to work hard to answer the challenge, to have the best education system not just for today but for the future of this province. That's why we're working so hard.

I'm glad I had a chance to clear this up for the leader of the third party.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: Let me go back to the Premier, since I think he needs to show some leadership on these issues.

Premier, I want to quote a letter. This is a letter from one of your MPPs, Mr Al McLean from Simcoe East. Mr McLean was responding to a letter from a teacher. The teacher had raised the issue with him that he was not happy with Bill 160 and that a lot of other teachers were not happy.

Mr McLean responds to the teacher this way. First of all, he says he believes that the College of Teachers may discipline any teacher for unacceptable action, and then he says to the teacher, "I'm going to send a copy of your correspondence to the Minister of Education, the College of Teachers and to the Simcoe County Board of Education," the teacher's employer. In other words, when someone tries to raise an education issue with your government, your response is to say to the teacher: "We're going to report you. We're going to bully you." Premier, is that your government's approach? Is that your approach to education issues?

Hon Mr Harris: If you'd like me to take a look at the letter, I'd be happy to. It sounds like a constituent talked to his member of Parliament, and he referred it to all the appropriate people.

Mr Hampton: Premier, I'm going to send over a copy of this letter. But this letter that went from the member for Simcoe East follows the lead of the conduct of your Minister of Education. That's why you need to show some leadership and you need to get involved in this situation. If you care about Ontario's school system, if you care about the children who are in that school system, you have to get involved to head off this kind of confrontation and intimidation.

Will you do that, Premier? Will you be the voice of reason in this and head off the confrontation that your Minister of Education has escalated everywhere in the province? Will you do that?

Hon Mr Harris: The Minister of Education.

The Speaker: Minister

Hon Mr Snobelen: Leader of the third party, I want you to know that today when we met with the heads of the teachers' unions in what I think was a constructive session, I asked them how to help us get to our mutual goal of having the highest student performance in Canada. I told them we clearly wanted to make sure that our class sizes didn't continue to grow as they did, sir, under your government. I said that we wanted to make sure our students had more time on task, as students in other provinces do. I told them we want to have a protocol for using experts to help teachers in the classroom. I told them we wanted to make sure that our secondary school teachers met the reasonable request of spending the same amount of time in class as their colleagues in other provinces. I suggested to

them that we were open to listening to their suggestions on how to make these improvements.

That's real consultation. That's a real, genuine request for input, and that's a hallmark of this government.

Mr Hampton: I'll go back to the Premier again. You should know what teachers' representatives said coming out of the meeting with your Minister of Education. The Minister of Education would give no guarantees that there would be reinvestment in the classroom. The Minister of Education would give no guarantees that the funding formula would be made public so that people concerned with education across this province would know how much money their children are going to have in the education system.

The only thing the Minister of Education would talk about is how teachers should go back to their communities and find ways to enable this government to get the money out. That's what the whole conversation was about.

Premier, will you show some leadership, leadership that the Minister of Education has failed totally to show? Will you meet with teachers' representatives and talk about the real issues in education, discuss real solutions rather than more ideology from the Minister of Education? Will you do that? Will you meet with teachers?

Hon Mr Harris: The Minister of Education.

The Speaker: Minister

Hon Mr Snobelen: I'm glad I have a chance to clear this up for the leader of the third party. I very directly put to the heads of the unions the challenges that face us. We put solutions before the people of Ontario, but we're willing to listen to their solutions.

These are very real issues. The leader of the third party should know that the growth in class size that has happened over the last decade is unacceptable to students and to parents, and we are suggesting a solution to that. We are also willing to listen to the teachers' solution to it.

He should know that the time on task has been identified as something that stands in the way of our students having the best performance in Canada. We intend to address that in the legislation we have before the House. We're willing to listen to other solutions. That's the process of consultation we've invited the teachers' unions to.

I have said today, as I have said in the past, that we're willing to pursue any process they suggest that would have us arrive at a solution. We're willing to listen to theirs.

PHYSICIANS' SERVICES

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I have a question for the Premier. I'd like you today to stand accountable for the Harris health system you've created and to deal with some of the consequences.

There are a couple of studies that have come out, one in the recent issue of Canadian Family Physician, which show how much young doctors, the doctors we pay thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of dollars to train, think of the Harris Ontario as a place to practise, a place to care for people. In a recent survey, 48% of the residents in family medicine say they're going to practise in the United States, and that's a jump from 17% before the measures you put into place restricting this health system.

Premier, you need to stand today and tell us and the people who live in Kitchener-Waterloo, in Peterborough, in Windsor, who have to travel long distances trying to find doctors, why the only underserviced area you seem to be successful at helping is the United States. Will you tell us today?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): As you know, we concluded successful negotiations with the doctors both to talk about areas of their involvement in health care decision-making and in terms of payment. I don't know if you're suggesting that we should give doctors more control or more money, but please tell us what your answer to that is.

Mr Kennedy: I appreciate it, Premier. We'll be happy to run the Ministry of Health if you want to hand it over. You seem not to have any interest yourself.

Premier, 30% of the orthopaedic surgeons who graduated recently have left. Another 23% say they're actively looking to the US.

You say you've made promises, and you have. You've made promises to communities. You said $5 million for a medical services corps, but not one contract has been signed, not one in the last six months. You talked about globally funded group practices in northern communities, and only one out of 29 communities has signed on to that because what you've come up with is so unworkable.

The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities says it doesn't want coercive measures. What they want is a Premier and a minister and a government to look after the health system, to keep new doctors in this province and to do, not just talk about it.

Will you stand today and say you'll sit down with the interns and residents and find practical ways to keep them in this country and stop training doctors for the United States, because you won't give us a quality health care system here in Ontario?

Hon Mr Harris: Of course we're always prepared to meet with all the professionals and non-professionals, those involved in all our systems, including doctors, and of course including the interns. As you know, the recent negotiations provided incentives for interns to go into underserviced areas. The information I have, and I don't have it in front of me, is that there are actually now fewer doctors leaving for the United States than there were either under your government or under the NDP.

If you think you have a better solution — I might add, first of all, you say that we're spending too much on doctors, that we gave them too much. Now you're saying we should give them more, I guess. Here is what Darlene Barnes, CEO of Humber hospital, says about the kind of question you asked: "While there are many issues and challenges in merging organizations, consolidating service, impacts on our patients, staff and community members" —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Harris: — "you seem more interested in generating fear within the community around the safety and quality of care provided individuals, regardless of whether or not the facts support" —

The Speaker: Thank you.

1420

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): A question to the minister responsible for municipal affairs: This is the pile of paper the Minister of Municipal Affairs sent to municipalities today, and there is nothing in it. There is no information in it about the government's so-called transition fund. There is no new information about seniors' housing or social housing and how municipalities are supposed to handle that. There is nothing in it that contradicts everyone's belief that your download is going to be in excess of $1.2 billion a year on to municipalities. There is nothing in this document for municipalities whatsoever.

Can you tell us, are you just inept? Is that why you couldn't provide them with any information? Are you just inept or are you trying to hide the information until after the municipal elections?

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): We have provided the municipalities, as we said we would — on August 6 we said we would give them the breakdown of the numbers on each program. Not only did we give them the numbers on each program, we gave them numbers on each option they would have. We gave them the numbers if they want to distribute the funds from the upper tier to the lower tier by population, if they want to distribute the numbers from upper tier to lower tier by assessment, or if they want to distribute the funds by caseload.

We wanted to make sure the municipalities had the right to select which option best suited their needs. I don't know how much more information they could get. They're probably suffering from information overload: three sets of numbers.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Answer, please.

Hon Mr Leach: The options are now theirs: how they want to distribute the numbers from the upper tier to the lower tier. The ball is now in their court. When they get back to us with that information we will be able to decide —

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Hampton: You could have saved yourself a lot of time. You could have simply stood up and admitted there is no new information here. Virtually every mayor in the greater Toronto area says this amounts to nothing more than a pile of paper. For that matter, all the mayors and reeves of northern Ontario got a note saying you don't have any information for them; you won't have any information for them until later.

Minister, do you not understand what is happening here? You're downloading at least $1.2 billion in new costs on to municipalities. You are forcing municipalities to pick up the cost of ambulances, you are forcing them to pick up the cost of seniors' apartments and social housing, you are forcing them to pick up the cost of public health, you are forcing them to pick up more of the cost of child care, of social assistance.

Reeves and mayors across this province deserve some information they can use. When are you going to give them real information, disclose the real numbers? When are you going to stop trying to hide the numbers?

Hon Mr Leach: We provided the numbers the municipalities need to make the decision on how they're going to distribute the cost between the upper tier and the lower tier. Again, we provided them with more than one number. We provided them with the ability to make that decision themselves. I know the member —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon Mr Leach: I repeat that the municipalities have been provided with the numbers they asked for. The ball is now in their court to get back to us and tell us how they want to distribute those funds between the upper tier and the lower tier. Once we know that and we know the effect on each of the lower-tier municipalities, we'll be able to distribute the community reinvestment fund so that every municipality will come out revenue-neutral. It will be revenue-neutral, as we have stated, and the numbers that have been provided are another step in the process of ensuring the municipalities that's going to happen.

I guess it's a surprise to some of the members of the opposition that we're in the process of a municipal election and it suits some local politicians not to be satisfied with anything.

AIR QUALITY

Mr Harry Danford (Hastings-Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Environment and Energy. I understand last week you announced your program with students involving local air monitoring. I'm wondering if you would expand on that announcement here in the House.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Order. I know we'll all want to hear the answer.

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Environment and Energy): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I know you will.

My ministry is working with schools, teachers, students and some corporate sponsors to bring an exciting new program to our high schools across Ontario called Partners in Air.

Last week I visited Hammarskjold High School in Thunder Bay and met with 30 grade 13 and grade 12 high school students. These students will be participating in experiments to measure the quality of air in their community. In addition to undertaking these measurements, they will be entering those results on a Web site and sharing those with a number of other schools across our province.

This program will engage our students in a brand-new endeavour, a brand-new area of interest in our environment; that is, the quality of our air. They're going to par-

ticipate. They're going to understand how valuable this resource is and how important it is to protect it.

Mr Danford: It's great to see that government and students and corporate sponsors cooperatively can participate in a program such as Partners in Air. What I'm wondering is, what other communities and companies —

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members for Hamilton East and Ottawa West, I want to be able to hear the question. It's difficult.

Mr Danford: The question is, I'm wondering what other communities and companies are involved in this process and how other communities could become involved in this endeavour.

Hon Mr Sterling: We presently have contacted 12 different high schools across our province. Besides Thunder Bay, high schools particularly interested in environmental studies in Sudbury, Huntsville, Ottawa, Scarborough, Etobicoke, Hamilton, Windsor, London, Cobourg, Sarnia and North Bay will all be involved. I want to tell you, the teachers and the students in these schools are very excited about this program.

In addition, the best part of this whole program is that it not only brings together my ministry with young people across this province, but it also brings together large corporations that are concerned about our air quality. They are stepping forward at a very rapid pace to become involved and sponsor these individual schools across our province. I think it's a tremendous program for our students, for our corporations and for this government.

1430

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms Annamarie Castrilli (Downsview): My question is for the Attorney General. It deals with a young woman who was found dead in her bed in February 1993. Cara Taylor was 17 years old. She was savagely beaten, raped and murdered. She was found with duct tape over her mouth, shot in the head.

There was an arrest made very quickly thereafter and Cara's parents were informed that the crown wanted to proceed with a plea bargain of nine years, which as we know would see the accused out in as little as three years in what was a very vicious crime. The family refused; the accused went to trial. He was found guilty, but a new trial was ordered.

The family has been trying to meet with you, Minister, over the last two years because they are concerned about the potential for a new plea bargain. They are worried that their daughter's interests will not be protected and that they will not be involved in the decision-making. Will you not meet with the family? They've already suffered so much. Give them some peace of mind.

Hon Charles Harnick (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): These are obviously very important questions, and I appreciate the question from the member. I can tell you that crown counsel, in these kinds of cases, are involved at the most senior levels. They will be involved in this case, assuredly, at the most senior levels. They will no doubt be dealing directly with the family, to keep them apprised of every step that's being taken. We'll consider the wishes of the family and work with the family in terms of the prosecution.

Ms Castrilli: I agree with you that this is a very serious matter. You yourself have known about this matter for some time. I have in my possession a letter from the Premier, when he was leader of the third party, to Mr Taylor indicating that he was referring this matter to the justice committee of your party, of which you were a member. We also have a letter from the member for St Catharines, who has asked you as well to meet with the family because all other avenues appear to be exhausted.

Your record on plea bargaining is not good. We've asked you time and time again to draft some clear guidelines to ensure that families are consulted. We've seen a deplorable result in the Homolka case, in the deal with the devil which has outraged people all across the country. You have made tremendous cuts to your ministry, which allow very little time for crown attorneys to deal with these cases and prosecute them to the fullest extent.

You have an opportunity now to do the honourable thing: to meet with the family, to draft some clear guidelines and to prevent another travesty of justice. I ask you, will you not do that?

Hon Mr Harnick: As I have indicated, senior crown counsel have been meeting with the family and will continue to meet with the family. They will continue to consult with the family. That's exactly what the member has asked and that's the proper approach.

In terms of how cases are dealt with, they're dealt with by professional crown attorneys, senior crown attorneys who are very experienced in dealing with these matters and appreciate the need to deal with families of victims of crime and work with them. That's what's happening in this case, that's what the general protocol is, that's what the Victims' Bill of Rights provides, and that's exactly what's happening in this situation.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): Premier, we read last week in the October 2 edition of Eye magazine, a widely distributed Toronto weekly, about your family values caucus. One of the members of that so-called family values caucus said, "We're anti-faggot." Premier, why do you tolerate and condone that language and the views it represents, and what are you going to do about it?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Of course I don't condone nor will I tolerate that language. The only place I've seen it is in some tabloid and from you today.

Mr Kormos: Premier, please, I'm not sure you understand how serious this is. Nigger, kike, faggot — it's all the same. This is language of violence, it's language of bigotry, it's language of hatred. It's language that breeds violence, bigotry and hatred. Your family values caucus has acquired a notoriety here in Ontario. Will you please determine whether or not it indeed was one of your back-

benchers who would use such language and promote such views, and take appropriate action.

Hon Mr Harris: I thought I made it very clear that I find that language offensive. It is not to be tolerated and will not be tolerated by me. Other than some allegation in a tabloid magazine, if you have anything else, other than that and the words I've heard from your lips, I've never heard of it — and I have checked into it — nor have any of the caucus members, to the best of my knowledge. If you have information other than some tabloid allegation, an unnamed source, please pass it on to me instead of trying to use your rhetoric to inflame the situation.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): I have a question for the Minister of Education. I read recently with great interest a report that was commissioned by the Waterloo region and written by an assistant professor of economics at the University of Waterloo, Dr Larry Smith. The report points out that since 1990, all the new jobs in our region have gone to skilled labour. Dr Smith states that in order to prepare individuals for the skilled workforce, we need to have a much-needed sense of employers' views of what are essential skills.

In response to the report, the president of Conestoga College, John Tibbits, has stated that there is a shortage of skilled labour to the point that a number of major companies in our region question whether they can continue to expand in our area. We have a terrible shortage of tool and die workers. Our industries are having to go to England and Germany to get these highly qualified individuals.

How important do you as the Minister of Education consider the development of the higher technical trade skills training in our schools?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for Kitchener for the question. I believe it's obvious that the skilled trades are very important to the future of our province and the future of your region. Therefore, attention must be focused on training and skills development in Ontario. That's why we've taken on the reform of the apprenticeship system in Ontario, an apprenticeship system that's governed by an act that's older than many of the apprentices in our system. As part of our reform of apprenticeship, we've gone out and asked industry, employers and employees for their opinion on how we can reform our system. In fact, we've surveyed many hundreds of people involved to find out what they would do to improve the system.

At the end of the day, we want to make sure our new system of apprenticeship in Ontario has a lot more input from employers and employees, because they have the information that will allow us to identify very quickly what the demands of our changing economy and our changing workplace will be and to meet those demands. So I'm pleased to inform the member for Kitchener that we're well under way with an apprenticeship review and reform in Ontario that will benefit all the people of Ontario.

Mr Wettlaufer: The Education in Waterloo Region report raises two points I think are both very important and interrelated. As well, according to the dean of technology of Seneca College, Dr Tony Tanner, 50,000 skilled workers in the Ontario auto industry are going to retire. The auto industry faces a very real possibility of a shortage of skilled labour in the near future. The report points out that high school students who don't pursue a post-secondary education are destined to be in and out of deadend jobs. At the same time, the report points out that the principal role of secondary schools is to prepare the student for post-secondary education, not to prepare the student directly for the labour force.

I find these findings very disturbing from the standpoint that the entire secondary educational system appears to be geared to a feeder program to the university system. Students who are not interested in following a university path may in essence be viewed as second-class students. What steps have you considered to elevate the importance of technical trades skill training in our schools in order —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member for Kitchener, thank you.

1440

Hon Mr Snobelen: I thank the member for Kitchener for the excellent, if somewhat long, question. The point that's raised by the member is a valid one. One of the great opportunities for secondary school reform is to address the 60% or 70% of our students who do not immediately go on to college or university but turn to the world of work or training. For those students, our system of education simply hasn't been up to the same level of standards and service that it has been for those students who go on to college and university.

The opportunity before us now in doing secondary school reform is to address that group of people to make sure their needs are met. That's been a central part of our putting together a new program of secondary school education in Ontario and again one of the great possibilities that we have as we move with people through the reforms to that high school system.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE APPEALS

Mr Gilles E. Morin (Carleton East): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. The current public hearings into Bill 142 are giving people a chance to air some extremely important concerns about this legislation. Last week the committee had a chance to hear from the Ombudsman of Ontario. From the beginning, the Ombudsman's office has been the last resort for people who felt that government had done them an injustice.

Ms Jamieson's remarks supported the concerns of people who feel that the appeal mechanisms in Bill 142 are an unprecedented erosion of their rights. The closure of the Timmins Ombudsman's office today further erodes the

last resort of appeal for all Ontarians. Minister, I'm sure that is not your intent. Would you please explain?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): I'm sorry, to the honourable member, I didn't hear the last part of his question, but I will respond to what I heard at the first part of the question regarding the Ombudsman's comments.

First of all, and we have clarified it in this House before, we are not removing the right of appeal for people on welfare in the social assistance legislation. It is still there. It's a very important legal foundation, as I understand law, in this country. Secondly, what we are doing is improving the appeal process by adding a new fast-track, if you will, informal process at the beginning, because what has happened is that many individuals on welfare have found the current appeal process to take many, many months and be a very legal process that they sometimes have great difficulty dealing with.

We want to have an appeal process, but we also want to see if we can fast-track and give them some answers within days with the more informal process at the front end of that appeal process.

Mr Morin: Perhaps, Minister, you didn't understand what I was saying.

The committee did say that it was their intent; nothing is in place. You must also not forget that the Ombudsman's office is a court of last appeal, last resort. In other words, you're taking away the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman. My concern: What is next to have its wings clipped, the Human Rights Commission, freedom of information, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner?

My question is this: Bill 142 passes on responsibility for administering social assistance to arm's-length municipal agencies over which the Ombudsman's office has no jurisdiction. The appeals process in Bill 142 is extremely complex and unforgiving for people who are already vulnerable. You are creating a paper chase and a blind-alley maze to rival any in government. The appeals tribunal, with limited powers, will function according to the policy directions of the party in power. Will you make the needed change to create a fair and transparent system? Will you protect the rights of people in need for an independent —

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Thank you.

Hon Mrs Ecker: As the honourable member is well aware, municipalities have been involved in the delivery and the decision-making process of welfare for many years in this province. They will continue to be involved in that. When we talk about delivery agents, that's who we are referring to, the municipalities, and that has been working extremely well. If there are any issues of concern that the Ombudsman has raised that cause legal questions about appeal rights to people who are on social assistance, I'm quite prepared to look at that.

PHYSICIANS' SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): In the absence of the Minister of Health, I have a question for the Premier.

The towns of Valley East and Rayside-Balfour have been declared underserviced for physicians' services for a long time, but this situation became a crisis for both communities when one of the physicians died and two others departed the community. In response to the crisis, the Centre de santé communautaire de Sudbury, which is a francophone CHC, diverted some of its global budget to fund a doctor two days a week in Rayside-Balfour and another doctor 1.5 days a week in Valley East. They serve primarily a francophone senior population.

Both doctors want to work full-time in the communities under the CHC model, so the centre applied to the Ministry of Health for funding, and this was denied. At the end of October the centre will stop funding these two physicians in these two communities because the board has decided they cannot run in a deficit position.

My question to you, Premier, is, will you ensure that your Minister of Health will fund physicians in these two underserviced areas in the Sudbury region?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I'd be happy to ask the minister to look into it, yes.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Supplementary; member for Nickel Belt.

Mr Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt): My supplementary is to the Premier. What he suggests has been done; we have approached the minister, and we're getting no satisfaction whatsoever.

I want to assure the Premier that no precedent would be set if this happened, because earlier this spring in the community of Merrickville, in the Solicitor General's riding, a physician left. The mayor and the CHC, the health centre, went to see the parliamentary assistant, the member for Huron, who told them, "No, we can't increase your budget because there's a ceiling on that, a freeze on that, and we simply can't do it." Lo and behold, they went to see the Solicitor General, their MPP. He intervened on their behalf with the Minister of Health, and guess what happened? They were funded. They got enough money to fund the physician.

This matter is urgent. Will you guarantee the same deal for the people of Valley East and Rayside-Balfour that the people in Merrickville got because of the Solicitor General?

Hon Mr Harris: I indicated I would be glad to have the Minister of Health look into it, and the Solicitor General maybe will talk to him and maybe they can all work on it.

We work cooperatively here in all ways to provide services. Thank goodness, I might add, that we've massively increased health care funding so we can help out in these situations.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Derwyn Shea (High Park-Swansea): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. I understand that you've just returned from several days of meetings with the nation's social services ministers. I have no doubt that a number of very important issues were

raised, but in particular, could you advise this House if you dealt with the national child benefit, and if so, could you update the House on the status of that issue?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Community and Social Services): Yes, I'm very pleased to do so. We had another excellent meeting with the national social services ministers. There has been, I would suggest, quite remarkable cooperation on this initiative between the federal government and the provinces.

As you know, earlier this year the federal government committed additional funding for a national child benefit. The provinces, including Ontario, agreed that that additional funding would be spent to help promote getting families off social assistance into the workforce, and second, to try and focus support in high-risk families.

What we did this week was to agree that another new step, the next step in implementation of this, is a new accountability framework so that the public in all our various provinces will see how this money is being spent, and the measurement for that will start April 1 next year.

Mr Shea: Minister, that was a very helpful and positive response. I'd like to go to another subject, though, on the same issue, that may flow from the minister's meetings. Can you advise the House if the topic of services for the disabled was dealt with, and if so, what was the outcome of the conversation?

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): This is not a different subject, I take it; it's a supplementary. You can't go to a different subject.

1450

Mr Shea: I prefaced it that as a result of that meeting, out of that meeting as well probably flowed another issue —

The Speaker: No, you didn't preface it that way, but I will continue. Minister?

Hon Mrs Ecker: One of the additional topics that was on the agenda did deal with services for the disabled. Ottawa has agreed to extend the vocational rehabilitation program which we share 50-50 to spend for services for the disabled. We approved this week the framework for negotiations so that we can continue that program. That's a very important program that funds many services for the disabled.

The other interesting thing is that because we've heard the message from people with disabilities that they want better-focused supports for employment, the name of that program, the focus of that program and the negotiations will be very much oriented towards employment and assistance to employment, because many people with disabilities can work and want to work. They need the employment supports to make sure that happens.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): In the absence of the Minister of Health, my question is to the Premier. As you know, the Health Services Restructuring Commission has recommended in Ottawa that two and half hospitals be closed — the Grace, the Riverside and a large part of the Montfort — and that some $128 million should be spent on capital renovations on the remaining hospitals. However, the district health council estimates this figure may be well underestimated by some $50 million to $80 million.

The commission has directed that for those hospitals slated for closure, admissions should halt starting in May, which is only eight months away, yet the funding formula to pay for these necessary renovations has yet to be confirmed by the Minister of Health. This is an important detail, holding up the commission's already aggressive time lines. Can the Premier confirm today that the funding formula will indeed be 70% provincial and 30% local, or 50-50 as currently rumoured?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Let me, since it's my first opportunity formally in the House, congratulate the member on his recent election, representing the citizens of Ottawa West.

I'd be happy to take the specifics of the question up with the Minister of Health, but I can assure you of this: The general direction of the government is that where capital restructuring costs have been agreed upon by the restructuring commission — and clearly if there is a disagreement with the district health council, the ministry will want to work that out —the 70% funding formula I think is the one that's been involved, if indeed the project falls under that.

I can also assure the member, since he may want to ask this, I don't know, by way of supplementary, that the inference is that decisions will have to be made on ensuring that equal or better services and facilities will be provided before any others would be phased out.

Mr Cullen: I'd like to thank the Premier for his assistance in this regard. However, it's been nine months since the restructuring commission issued its initial report, and two months from its final report, and yet we're going to see admissions being stopped at these hospitals in eight months' time.

Even at a 30% local share, based on current estimates, the local contribution to these capital costs will be somewhere in the order of $40 million to $50 million, which is beyond the capacity of the local hospital boards to fundraise. Will the Premier make a commitment today that local property taxpayers will not be asked to fork over property tax dollars to pay for the province's restructuring costs in Ottawa-Carleton?

Hon Mr Harris: I have information that there will be an announcement on capital shortly. As you know, we have allocated $2 billion for restructuring costs. Certainly I don't think all $2 billion will go to Ottawa, but the appropriate portion will come forward to ensure that Ottawa is treated as fairly and, I might add, better than they have under any previous government.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): The petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it concerns Bill 160.

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's educational system; and

"Whereas we cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestments in education rather than reductions in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature to the petition.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I have a petition from Bawating Collegiate and Vocational School in Sault Ste Marie. A number of students have signed it. It says:

"Whereas the students and staff of Bawating Collegiate and Vocational School and the people of Sault Ste Marie are gravely concerned about the direction of the education policies of the government of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That Bill 160 be withdrawn immediately."

This was given to me for presentation by Sean from Bawating, and I want to thank him for all the work he's done.

COURT DECISION

Mr Bob Wood (London South): I have a petition signed by 240 people.

"Whereas the courts have ruled that women have the lawful right to go topless in public; and

"Whereas the Liberal government of Canada has the power to change the Criminal Code to reinstate such public nudity as an offence;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario to pass a bill empowering municipalities to enact bylaws governing dress code and to continue to urge the government of Canada to pass legislation to reinstate such partial nudity as an offence."

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Bill 160 violates the democratic values upheld in our schools and society by granting ultimate power to the Minister of Education and his or her cabinet to override any collective bargaining rights or agreements with unchallenged regulations; and

"Whereas Bill 160 grants the Minister of Education and his or her cabinet control of school boards' finances, leaving school boards in the very difficult position of trying to bargain with their employees without jurisdiction over the funds upon which many of the agreements depend; and

"Whereas Bill 160 will lead to more strikes by school board employees (under the present Bill 100, 96% of collective agreements have been settled without the need for striking; under Bill 160 settlements will be extremely difficult to reach due to government control of funds); and

"Whereas the cuts in funding expected under Bill 160 will result in fewer qualified teachers, fewer resources, unqualified teachers in the classrooms, larger classes, which will necessarily lower the present excellent quality of Ontario education; and

"Whereas Bill 160 will result in the demoralization of teachers by the swift, severe and undemocratic cancellation of their contracts and all they have fought for during the past decades to improve the profession; and

"Whereas given the above, Bill 160 will destroy the excellent quality of education that Ontario students now enjoy and benefit from;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Please repeal Bill 160 entirely."

It's signed by some 150 Ontario residents, and I have affixed my signature.

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by more than 100 people.

"Whereas over half the people in Ontario are women;

"Only 5% of the money spent on medical research goes to research in women's health;

"Women have special medical needs since their bodies are not the same as men's;

"Women's College is the only hospital in Ontario with a primary mandate giving priority to teaching, research and care dedicated to women's health needs;

"The World Health Organization has named Women's College Hospital as its first collaborating centre for women's health in both North and South America;

"Without a self-governing Women's College Hospital, the women of Ontario and of the world will lose a health resource that is not duplicated elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the comprehensive model of

women's health pioneered by Women's College Hospital through ensuring self-governance of the one hospital in Ontario dedicated to women's health."

I am proud to add my signature.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I have a set of petitions brought forward by the people from Pet Valu in Port Colborne and the Cat Clinic in Niagara Falls that read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ownership of a domestic animal or pet is a responsibility, not a right; and

"Whereas owners have a responsibility to treat their pet with care and utmost concern for their wellbeing; and

"Whereas cruelty to animals should be punished/sanctioned with fines, penalties and/or bans on animal ownership; and

"Whereas inspectors of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act should not be obstructed from carrying out their duties to investigate abuse and neglect;

"We, the undersigned, support the amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

In support, I have put my signature.

1500

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I have a petition signed by parents and teachers from all across northwestern Ontario. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas you cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

Speaker, if I can beg your indulgence, I want to introduce Sarah Rice-Bredin, page from Thunder Bay who will be leaving us after tomorrow, who's done a marvellous job.

I'm happy to sign my name to this petition.

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I have a petition regarding the need for a public inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton.

"Whereas a fire at a PVC plastic vinyl plant located in the middle of one of Hamilton's residential areas burned for three days; and

"Whereas the city of Hamilton declared a state of emergency and called for a limited voluntary evacuation of several blocks around the site; and

"Whereas the burning of PVC results in the formation and release of toxic substances such as dioxins, as well as large quantities of heavy metals and other dangerous chemicals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold a full public inquiry on the Hamilton Plastimet fire."

I continue to support my constituents by signing this petition.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): A petition from all around the Niagara Peninsula, with probably about 1,000 or so signatures, that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ownership of a domestic animal is a responsibility, not a right;

"Whereas owners have a responsibility to treat their pet with care and utmost concern for their wellbeing; and

"Whereas cruelty to animals should be punished/sanctioned with fines, penalties and/or bans on animal ownership; and

"Whereas inspectors of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act should not be obstructed from carrying out their duties to investigate abuse or neglect;

"We, the undersigned, support the amendments to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

I affix my signature in support.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Gilles E. Morin (Carleton East): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced Bill 142, An Act to revise the law related to Social Assistance by enacting the Ontario Works Act and the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, by repealing the Family Benefits Act, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act and the General Welfare Assistance Act and by amending several other Statutes; and

"Whereas Bill 142 and its regulations will have a direct and substantial impact on the lives of many people with disabilities and their families;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urge the government of Ontario to release the proposed regulations related to Bill 142 immediately, so that there can be meaningful public discussion of the changes that will result from this legislation; and to ensure that Bill 142 and its regulations are subject to extensive and public hearings across Ontario so that the people who are affected by this legislation and the related regulations are given adequate opportunity to be heard."

I will sign this petition.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I have a petition here from Sean O'Brien in Sault Ste Marie, a student at Bawating Collegiate and Vocational School. He says:

"On Wednesday, September 24, 1997, many students from Bawating Collegiate and Vocational School and other secondary schools in Sault Ste Marie walked out to protest Bill 160. On the day of the walkout we managed to schedule an appointment with Tony Martin, Sault Ste Marie's MPP. He informed us of our rights of protest and we subsequently made this petition against Bill 160. We obtained approximately 140 signatures from citizens of Sault Ste Marie against this bill. We believe that Bill 160 should not be passed, and if it is, there will be more student protests and walkouts in Sault Ste Marie."

I sign my signature to this as well.

TVONTARIO

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, oppose any plans to privatize TVOntario and strongly support TVOntario's proposal to convert the agency to a not-for-profit corporation. We, the undersigned, strongly urge the government of Ontario to ensure continued access by Wahsa and Wawatay radio to TVO's distribution system. The privatization of TVOntario would jeopardize the excellent educational and information programming provided by TVOntario. The sale of TVOntario to commercial interests would also jeopardize Wawatay radio network's native language programming, and Wahsa's distance education services, because both depend on TVO's distribution system."

I have attached my name to that petition as well.

EDUCATION FINANCING

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I have another petition here from students in Sault Ste Marie concerned about Bill 160. This has come to my attention via Peter Korab, president of the student council at St Mary's College. He says the following, accompanied by at least 50 letters, some of them handwritten by students from St Mary's College. It says:

"I'm writing this letter to express my concerns over the changes your government is making to the education system in Bill 160.

"Whereas that bill and its effects could be detrimental to the quality of education in this province; and

"Whereas your goal to create a more efficient and cost-productive education system, while laudable, is in direct opposition to the findings of your government's research through the Education Improvement Commission; and

"Whereas I've never heard the exact class size you wish to create, nor has anyone else for that matter, I believe that cutting money from the education system and laying off teachers would do grievous damage to the quality of our educational program; and

"Whereas replacing teachers with uncertified experts also seems to be a questionable decision, because though those people would have the knowledge, they would not have the training to deal with the needs of students and would have difficulty expressing their knowledge to the student; and

"Whereas eliminating preparation time and professional activity days from teachers would prevent them from having an accessible method of upgrading and broadening the curriculum they teach, paying them to stay longer hours seems a dubious method of saving people money, nor does it better the education of those of us who consult with our teachers regularly on our free time; and

"Whereas no teacher of mine has ever said to me that they didn't have extra time in the day to help me or my fellow students with the problems we were having, we feel, however, that your improvements to the education system will create that problem and that every student in Ontario will lose out because of your government's decisions to put profits over personal enrichment. Please withdraw bill 160."

I attach my name to this.

Mr Joseph Cordiano (Lawrence): I have a petition from the St Bernard parent advisory committee. It's addressed to the Minister of Education, Mr Snobelen.

"Dear Mr Snobelen:

"Our children are our future. We cannot allow your government to gut our education system. Education must be protected at all costs.

"Therefore we, as a parent advisory committee, would like to voice our concern with the current bills before the Legislature.

"We, the undersigned, disagree with your massive downsizing plans for the province's educational system."

It's signed by approximately 100 individuals.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas education is our future; and

"Whereas students and teachers will not allow their futures to be sacrificed for tax cuts; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers will not allow the government to bankrupt Ontario's education system; and

"Whereas you cannot improve achievement by lowering standards; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers want reinvestment in education rather than reduction in funding; and

"Whereas students, parents and teachers won't back down;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw Bill 160 immediately; and

"Further, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario instruct the Minister of Education and Training to do his homework and to be a cooperative learner rather than imposing his solution which won't work for the students, parents and teachers of Ontario."

I affix my signature as I'm in complete agreement with this petition.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): I'm sorry, I missed the rotation. I apologize. Further petitions? The member for Hamilton Centre.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas approximately 300 workers are killed on the job each year and 400,000 suffer work-related injuries and illnesses; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario continues to allow a massive erosion of WCB prevention funding; and

"Whereas Ontario workers are fearful that the government of Ontario, through its recent initiatives, is threatening to dismantle workers' clinics and the Workers' Health and Safety Centre; and

"Whereas the workers' clinics and the Workers' Health and Safety Centre have consistently provided a meaningful role for labour within the health and safety prevention system; and

"Whereas the workers' clinics and the Workers' Health and Safety Centre have proven to be the most cost-effective prevention organizations funded by the WCB;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately cease the assault on the workers' clinics and the Workers' Health and Safety Centre; and

"Further we, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that the workers' clinics and the Workers' Health and Safety Centre remain labour-driven organizations with full and equitable WCB funding and that the WCB provide adequate prevention funding to eliminate workplace illness and injury."

On behalf of my caucus colleagues, I add my name to theirs.

1510

OPPOSITION DAY

EDUCATION FINANCING

FINANCEMENT DE L'ÉDUCATION

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): I move that:

Whereas the Minister of Education and Training has said that the provincial government intends to take a further $1 billion away from the education of Ontario children; and

Whereas the Mike Harris Conservative government appears determined to provoke a work stoppage by Ontario teachers, thereby disrupting the education of Ontario students; and

Whereas Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, removes the right of school boards to raise revenue for the purpose of funding local schools and meeting local students' needs; and

Whereas the Minister of Education and Training has stated that the future role of school boards will be limited to negotiating teachers' salaries and benefits while the provincial government limits boards' funds; and

Whereas Ontario teachers should enjoy all the rights to collectively bargain terms and conditions of work that are enjoyed by other Ontario workers, including an unrestricted right to strike; and

Whereas the Mike Harris Conservative government has created uncertainty about the level of funding that will be provided to school boards for the purpose of educating Ontario children;

Therefore be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the Mike Harris Conservative government to withdraw Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act; to restore the right to local school boards and teachers' federations to negotiate local, quality learning conditions for Ontario students; and to make public the new funding formula and the exact dollar amounts to be allocated for educating students across the province.

Speaker, I will be dividing my time with my leader and the member for Sudbury East.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): I have just been informed the time is split equally among all the parties, so you can use it how you wish.

Mr Wildman: The reason that we have moved this motion today is because we face a very critical situation with regard to the education of Ontario students. I must say that, considering the importance of this motion and the serious situation we face potentially where the disruption of classes may in fact occur within a number of days in this province, I think it is most unfortunate that there is such a dearth of members on the government side. In particular, the Minister of Education and Training is not present. I know it's not in order to mention that, so I would not normally have done that, but I find it most

inappropriate that the government appears to be giving short shrift to this important debate this afternoon.

Repeatedly since the minister was appointed, since the Conservative government came to power in this province, the minister and his colleagues have indicated that the government believes there is a lot of money wasted in funding education in the province; that in fact billions of dollars could be removed from education funding without affecting classroom education. Of course that shows a complete ignorance or perhaps a deliberate ignoring of the facts. We all know that approximately 70%, on average, of school boards' budgets in Ontario go towards salaries for teachers and education workers — 70%. So when the government last year took $400 million out of education over a four-month period — on an annualized basis close to $1 billion — it was impossible for those savings to be achieved without adversely affecting classroom education for students in Ontario.

School boards, in response to that, did a number of things. They cut back on junior kindergarten funding. They discontinued daytime adult education programs and shifted adult education simply to continuing education. They cut back on supplies for classrooms and on special programs. Particularly at the elementary level, programs in things like music and art were hurt.

Of particular concern to me, as a parent and someone who is interested in education, is the fact that special education programs were cut. We all know that the law in this province requires school boards to provide special education to students with special needs in Ontario, yet boards found themselves in a situation where they had to cut back. Some boards did not do that. Some boards, instead of cutting, increased taxes to make up for the drop in grants that they receive from the provincial government. This government reacted very angrily to that. It said: "No, that's not what we want. We don't want school boards to increase taxes." As a result, the minister then levelled his guns at the boards and said, "We're going to take the power of boards to raise taxes away from them so that this won't happen again."

The minister has indicated repeatedly that he intends to take another $1 billion out of education. If, on top of the cuts that have already occurred, the minister intends to take another $1 billion out of education, that means he must cut teachers. There is no other way to do it. The minister himself has admitted that he intends to cut by a little more than 4,000 the number of teaching positions in Ontario. The minister repeatedly says that he is interested in the quality of education for students. He has yet to explain how, by cutting the number of teachers who teach our students, we are going to increase the quality of education.

He has also said, initially at least, that he would replace a number of those teachers who are out of work as a result of his moves with people whom he calls "experts." These are people who could perhaps teach, or have some expertise in music and art, physical education, computers, those kinds of things. He would put those people in the classroom, even though they aren't certified to teach and they've had no pedagogical training, to replace teachers. It is beyond me how this is going to improve the quality of education for students in the province.

He has made it very, very clear that he believes that early childhood educators with diplomas from community colleges should be able to replace junior kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, despite all the studies that indicate the importance of good pedagogy at that level for the success of students throughout not just their educational careers, but through their whole lives. Of course, when the teachers then raised objections to these kinds of plans, the minister also levelled his guns at them, and that's why we face the possible confrontation in this province today.

The fact that we had Bill 160 before the House and then the government introduced a time allocation motion cutting off debate on Bill 160 at second reading indicates to me that in fact the government intends to provoke a confrontation. It appears to me that the only group that wants to have a strike by teachers in Ontario disrupting the education of students is the Tory caucus in this place. The introduction of that time allocation motion was a provocation. It was intended to further demoralize the teachers, make them angry enough that they might take precipitous action.

The minister has said that it's not right to use students as pawns in a political dispute. In fact, he is doing exactly that. He is trying to turn the public against the teachers by saying that if the teachers take action it will hurt the students, ignoring the fact that the teachers intend to do everything they can to protect the students against the actions of this government, against the desire of this government to take $1 billion out of the system to fund a tax cut which will benefit 10% of the population who don't need it.

1520

Bill 160, as a result, constricts the scope of collective bargaining, takes away the rights of teachers to bargain their conditions of work and the learning conditions of their students and takes all power away from local boards to negotiate these matters. It gets rid of local accountability and local governance and control over education. It gives less input to parents and ratepayers about the education in their communities and centralizes all control over education in the Ministry of Education here at Queen's Park. This, from a government that claims to be interested in local autonomy and getting government close to people.

How is it that any ratepayer is going to have any influence over a government where all the decisions about education funding, curriculum, the organization of the schools are made by faceless bureaucrats in this Queen's Park complex? Nobody elects those bureaucrats. They can't be held accountable by local ratepayers. They can't be defeated at the next election if the ratepayers disagree with what they did. It's a complete denial of what this government says it really stands for, that is, local control over government services.

School boards and teachers will only be able to negotiate salaries and benefits. They won't be able to negotiate issues related to quality of education, they won't be able

to negotiate issues related to the organization of schools, the size of classes, the number of students per teacher, the number of hours teachers spend in the classroom, the number of hours teachers have for preparation. All these matters will be decided by regulation under Bill 160, decided behind closed doors by the Minister of Education and then rubber-stamped by the cabinet behind closed doors. There will be no input, teachers will not have a say, trustees will not have a say, and there will be no local control.

Of course, the teachers are particularly upset about the fact that this government threatened to take away their right to strike, their right to withdraw their services in a dispute with their employer. The minister has said: "I don't know why the teachers are upset any more. We said we might take away the right to strike," as well as removing principals and vice-principals from the bargaining units and perhaps the requirement that teachers be members of federations in order to teach in the province. "We threatened to do those things, but then we said, 'No, no, we wouldn't do that,' and we didn't do it in Bill 160. So why are the teachers mad?"

As I said last night, it's a bit like someone coming along and threatening to bomb your house and then subsequently saying: "No, I won't bomb your house. I'm just going to throw a rock through your front window. I'll just break your front window, so you shouldn't be unhappy any more. I didn't bomb your house, I didn't destroy your home, I just broke your front window."

Teachers believe and we believe as a party that all workers in a democratic society have the right to remove their labour in a dispute with their employer. We believe that all workers in a democratic society have the right to strike to try to win in a contract dispute. We don't advocate strikes, we don't advocate lockouts, but we believe that workers should have the unrestricted right to remove their labour in a dispute. Of course, they have the responsibility then to take the consequences when they do that: the loss of pay, the loss of benefits and so on.

We think the government must state clearly that it believes teachers should enjoy the right to bargain collectively all the terms and conditions of work enjoyed by other Ontario workers, including the unrestricted right to strike, and we call on all members of this assembly to vote in favour of this motion to show that they support the democratic right of all workers in collective bargaining.

Overall, though, we are particularly concerned about the fact that this government has created so much uncertainty about the level of funding. We have before the House Bill 160, which makes enormous changes in the education system, but the central question is not answered in that bill, and that is, how much money is there going to be for the education of students in Ontario? The government has intentionally not told the school boards, the teachers, the parents, the students and the ratepayers how much money there's going to be in education.

We've repeatedly in this House given the minister and the Premier the opportunity to make it clear that this government will not take any more money out of education, not one more cent; that they will reinvest any moneys they save because of school board restructuring back into education in the classroom for students. Repeatedly, the minister and the Premier have refused to make that commitment. They just completely reject that. They just over and over say, "We will spend what's necessary," which basically means, "We will take money out of the system and we will decide what is necessary," and that will be less than there is now.

Kids' education in Ontario has been hurt by the cuts of this government already. Further cuts in education in the realm of $1 billion will hurt education in the classroom. It will be disastrous for the future of our kids in Ontario. It will mean the end of junior kindergarten, the end of many programs that parents and students want and need to gain the skills they'll require to achieve well going into the 21st century. Teachers know that. That's why teachers are so angry and concerned. That's why teachers are prepared, if necessary, to disrupt the education in the short term for their students to protect the long-term future for their students. Teachers care about students, they care about learning, they care about learning conditions, and they're prepared to take action if necessary.

It's up to the government now to make the moves, to try to cool the situation, to pull back, to make a commitment that there won't be more money taken out of education, to talk to the teachers and to work out changes that will be beneficial to the students, that will protect the rights of teachers so we can get on with improving the quality of education for all the students in Ontario.

I call on the members of the assembly to support our resolution and to give a message to the Minister of Education and Training and to the government that it's time to work with teachers, with trustees, with parents and all interested in quality education, particularly with students, to improve the quality of education.

The government must withdraw Bill 160, must restore the rights of local boards and teachers to negotiate learning conditions for Ontario students, and above all, the government must make the funding formula public so that we all know exactly how much money this government is prepared to spend on the education of our students in Ontario. I call on all members to support this resolution.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Tony Clement (Brampton South): It's my pleasure on behalf of the constituents of Brampton South to join the debate this afternoon on what indeed is a very important issue.

I think it comes as no surprise to any members of this House who are in contact with their constituencies that this is an issue that has been the subject of numerous telephone calls, communications via fax and e-mail and face-to-face conversations. Any of us who have had any connection with our constituencies at all would know that this issue definitely is on the radar screen with our constituents.

What I find interesting, actually, is that this is nothing new. For the past two and a half years since I've been elected, this issue has been I would say at the forefront of

the minds of many of my constituents, and I'm sure I'm not speaking alone on this. Making sure that health care is available to all in their time of need and ensuring that our streets and our homes remain safe I think are priority issues for Ontarians. Those are the ones that they tell us time and time again they want to see the government see as priority issues.

1530

That's the mandate this government received. People understood that government was not working for them, that government was trying to be all things to all people. They wanted government to make some real changes in how it did things, but they said the priorities have to be better delivery of health care services, of education for our kids and the way our justice system works to make sure that our streets and homes are safe. So those have to the priorities of any government that is worth its salt, and certainly that is the mandate of this government.

But at the same time, parents in particular have been asking me and my colleagues a number of questions: Why is our student performance not better? It's not the worst in the world by any stretch of the imagination, but it's not the best in the world. It's not even in the top three by any of the indices that are used and generally acceptable in the pedagogical community.

Why are our costs higher than those in other provinces? This goes back to the point that this isn't necessarily about costs per se. I think we all know that parents and taxpayers are willing to pay for a quality education. What they object to is paying near the top of the OECD average, when it comes to per capita spending on education, yet the results are not the worst, but they are middling; they are mediocre. They are not the best for our students when they have to compete around the world for jobs and opportunity.

Why do our students spend less time in terms of educational instruction than high school students elsewhere in Canada? Our proposal on this I think is a fairly reasonable one. Add half an hour a day of instruction time —

Interjection: Eight minutes a period.

Mr Clement: Eight minutes a period, a colleague reminds me, perhaps stretch out the day or the length of time of an average school day, eliminate some professional development days and ensure that as per the Education Improvement Commission report our children spend as much time as is possible in the classroom receiving instruction, having that interaction with the teachers. I think that's a fair question.

All of these questions have come up, at least in my experience, over the last two and a half years. People are not saying that someone is to blame, that the teacher is to blame or the student is to blame or the parent is to blame. Nor are we saying that, and let me repeat this point: I don't think any of us on this side of the aisle are saying that the public enemy number one is teachers. That is not what we're saying at all. In fact, teachers are the victims of this system just as much as students are the victims and parents are the victims.

We've got a system that isn't working as well as it should, given the amount of money we are spending on the system. We've got to change that. I'm not saying it's a dollars-and-cents thing. It is a quality-of-education question. I have talked to a number of teachers. I've visited a number of schools in my riding, not only at school council nights, not only on special nights like that but also in classrooms in the high schools, in the elementary schools, in the middle schools in my riding. I know the frustrations that teachers are experiencing day in, day out in their professional lives.

This didn't start on September 22 with the introduction of Bill 160. This was here. This was building up year after year and indeed over a period of perhaps a decade or a decade and a half, I dare say. As a result of those frustrations, I think teachers are the first to say that we've got to do a better job of qualitatively making sure that our children receive the best-quality instruction imaginable in our system.

By virtue of their profession, certainly, they are not the cause of this problem. They're not. The parents, many of them double-income families, not by choice but because that is what that family has to do to survive, are doing what they can. The students, by and large, want to learn. There are always exceptions, but I think we can safely say that in Ontario the students want to learn.

That begs the question: If all those essential aspects to the education system want it to succeed, the problem is the system itself, the system that has evolved over a period of time, a system that has a lot of resources. Fourteen billion dollars a year is not somehow a low number. That is a very large amount of money on behalf of the taxpayers of Ontario.

The questions are, how is that $14 billion spent? How do we construct a system that allows for more instructional time, allows for our children to get the quality and the benefit of teacher instruction which should be second to none? How do we ensure that testing and curriculum are such that our students are given benchmarks and are given goals and encouraged to meet those goals?

That is what we want for our children and that is the system that parents are demanding, not me as a politician standing here in a place in this chamber, but it's what the parents are demanding. It's what the students are demanding. They know when the system is shortchanging them through lack of proper instructional time, through lack of a proper curriculum. They know that and they are willing to work within a system that will allow them to have that curriculum, have that instructional time.

Some of the members opposite say, "Why are you rushing?" Studies and commissions galore have been done. In my lifetime alone — I've done a little bit of research on this — there have been 24 separate reviews, 10 commissions and committees, two fact-finding reports, two panels and innumerable meetings to discuss education reform.

As I've said, this has been on the agenda of the public for a good number of years, I would say over the last 10 to 15 years, and now is the opportunity for the government to respond to those demands from parents and students and to

act not on behalf of the political class, not on behalf of one particular segment of our society. If I can believe the rhetoric, that is what everybody wants, what the opposition wants, what the teachers want, what the parents want and certainly what the students want, which is better quality education. Our plan was drawn up with that in mind. Studies are not any substitute for action. We need a new, revitalized curriculum with rigorous year-by-year standards, not fuzzy goals that may or may not be met.

I've read through in its entirety the curriculum proposed by Minister Snobelen on grades K to 8 and I can tell you that in each and every year of that curriculum there is a plan of action for each and every student to obtain the goals that parents would like to have set in the system. We need province-wide testing and we need standardized report cards that will let parents and the students themselves see clearly whether their children are meeting the standards we have set through the curriculum.

All of that is necessary, and we need the Education Quality Improvement Act. That is the next step and is part and parcel of the comprehensive plan to put quality and achievement back in our educational system. How does it do that? If this bill is passed by this Legislature, it will do it by improving the governance of our schools.

An honourable member opposite said that we wanted everything to be decided by this governmental level, by the province of Ontario level. Nothing could be farther from the truth and I want to set the record straight right now. We want schools to have more say in terms of the application of the curriculum; we want schools to have more say in terms of ensuring that the school is a safe place for our children and for our teachers; we want schools to have more say in the direction of education in that individual school; we have to increase the involvement of the parents, not because we want to give them more things to do but because parents are demanding more of a say in their children's education; and we've got to simplify the financing of our education system.

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I need not remind the members opposite — they were struggling with this when they were in government — that the funding formula this province imposes upon our education partners has no rhyme or reason. It has been encrusted like barnacles to a ship — 40 years of decisions, individual decisions perhaps based on individual circumstances. Now the result is that we in Ontario cannot guarantee an equal access to a quality of education for every single student in the system.

I think that is a moral abomination. If we cannot stand up in this House and say that at least we have formulated a system that strives to that goal, an equal access to a quality education, I think we are remiss as members of this chamber. That is why the financing reform has to occur, coupled with, member for Algoma, a funding formula that makes sense. He put it well. That has to be part of the package as well and I join him in anticipating that funding formula as soon as is practicable.

Sometimes we are criticized, Madam Speaker — I know this will come as a surprise to you — in this House for acting too quickly; now we are criticized for acting too slowly, because we want to get the funding formula to be a correct funding formula, a funding formula that makes sense for every single student who is currently in the system and will be in the system in the future. I want to make sure, as my colleagues do, that funding formula is the right funding formula, a funding formula we can be proud of. So we anticipate it in the weeks ahead.

This bill will allow the government to set standards for quality — what a concept: standards for quality — as demanded by the parents and the students in the system. This includes the amount of instructional time our children receive.

I was talking to a constituent this morning. This is an individual case, I know, and it certainly is not indicative of every teacher in the system, but she said that her child — she admitted the child was not a very outgoing person, didn't like to speak a lot — had got through an entire grade, grade 8, and the teacher had not spoken to this child once. My constituent was in tears. She was in tears because the system hadn't worked for her. This is not an indictment on teachers at all; this is an indictment on a system that has not worked for a parent, and when it hasn't worked for the parent, it hasn't worked for the child as well. I think we can do better than that. I think we must do better than that for that individual case.

We want to have a bill that will promote improved student access to professionals with special expertise, not to replace the teachers, as the rhetoric has it, but to supplement and add to what teachers do so very well in the classroom. In fact, they do it so well we want them to spend more time in the classroom doing what they do well. We want to have specialists in computer technology, the arts and career guidance who will enrich our children's education and broaden their horizons.

My colleague the member for Brampton North, Mr Spina, had a career as a businessperson, but he was also an instructor in the community college system. He also helped our community college students in their goals of understanding not only the academic rigours, but also the rigours of real-life experience. Gee, wouldn't it be nice, not necessarily in an instructional environment, to have the advantage of some of those experiences in the classroom prior to community college or university? I think so.

I think we've got to create a system, and this bill does this, to make sure the system is more accountable to parents by making it mandatory to establish advisory councils in every school. We're not saying every parent has to be involved in the minutiae of every single decision in the school, but wouldn't it be nice to allow parents the opportunity to participate in the school's governance? The principal is there as the manager; we know that. She has the advantage of vice-principals and the staff and department heads. But wouldn't it be nice to ensure that our students and parents have that opportunity as well to be part and parcel of the school environment?

The bill would give the province, not the school boards but the province, the responsibility for setting all educational property taxes via the mill rate or via taking half of

it off and putting it on income tax and sales tax revenue generation.

Time and time again we've had a situation, in all our ridings, where funding decisions are bifurcated; that is to say, they are split between the school boards and their budgetary process and the province. Perhaps we're all guilty of this; maybe I can stand at the front of the line.

The fact of the matter is politicians of all stripes have engaged in this process, where a constituent phones up and says, "I'm not happy with some of the choices that have been made at my school in terms of what is funded and what isn't funded." We say: "Oh, well, gee, we don't really make those choices at Queen's Park. We write the cheque, but the choice is made by your school board." Then the hapless voter goes to the school board trustee and says, "I don't like some of the decisions that were made in terms of the funding in the school." They say: "I don't know why you're talking to us. It's the province that writes the cheque." You've got politicians buck-passing.

A system cannot work unless a politician is accountable. The buck has to stop somewhere. Let us declare for all who are watching that under this bill, should it pass, the buck will stop in this chamber, in this Legislature, with the government of the day.

That's a lot of responsibility, I acknowledge that, but in order to work the system has to be accountable. Someone has to respond and answer to the parent and to the student to ensure the system works. This bill would ensure that. It's an awesome responsibility, one which I dare say will take a lot of time and energy to implement well. But it is a system that has to happen because every time a politician buck-passes, that's an additional opportunity for a tax hike to occur without the quality in there, for a service to be cut, for young teachers to be fired rather than the fountains being shut off at the expensive educational office. Those decisions can be made when there's no accountability. We've got to ensure the accountability is there for our parents and our students.

I think these changes are good for Ontario. We want to get a little bit of input, I think quite a good deal of input, in the eight days of discussions and dialogue we will have when Bill 160 goes out to public hearings. It will be an opportunity, I hope, to hear from a myriad of sources: parents; teachers, if I had to predict, will be represented at those hearings; and students themselves have to be there as well.

I welcome, and I know my government welcomes, that input, that dialogue. That dialogue has to continue. This is not just about one simple case of Bill 160 and the world will be better. Let's not overpromise in this chamber. But Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, is another step, along with the report card being standardized, along with some standardized testing and accountability, along with a funding formula that makes sense.

All of those are building blocks to an education system that is accountable and responsive to the student's requirement to have a quality education so that she or he has an equal opportunity to succeed in this province, so they don't have to compete by leaving. That is what the legacy has been in Ontario over the past 15 years: If you had any sort of smarts, you went to Milan or Shanghai or Boston to find a job. We've got to create the jobs here in Ontario. That means we've got to ensure our students have the skills to succeed and compete well in this province, not only for themselves but for their children as well.

That is what this bill is all about. It is a bill about education quality, it is a bill about more instruction time for our students and it is a bill, I believe, that will get us on the road — not all the way but on the road — to the education system that parents and students and everyone in Ontario who calls himself or herself a citizen of this province, in the fullest sense of the word, demands for our education system. I am proud to support it.

1550

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Fort William): I will speak briefly to this resolution, although I consider it to be an important one and I'm speaking in full support of the resolution. I'm going to speak briefly because there are a number of my colleagues who want an opportunity at this very critical time in the history of education in Ontario to express some of their concerns about this government's agenda for education. They would have welcomed an opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 160, the bill which is forcing our teachers to the precipice and bringing our students to the verge of facing a strike situation in which all of our schools are closed.

Our members would have liked an opportunity to speak to the changes proposed in that bill, but since the debate was cut off, because the government closed off the debate and forced Bill 160 through this Legislature last night, our members will welcome an opportunity to at least express a few of their concerns as they speak to this resolution.

I've had my opportunity to speak to Bill 160, as well as frequent opportunities to address other legislative initiatives of this government. I suspect I will have more in the future, although when I look at Bill 160 I realize that my opportunity to participate in any public debate on education in the province of Ontario is going to be extremely limited, because what Bill 160 does is take all control into the hands of cabinet. There will not be need for future legislative initiatives from this government once it gets Bill 160 passed, because anything it wants to do it can do by regulation. They won't need to come back to the Legislature. There's no need for messy, time-consuming debate. They can just make the decisions in cabinet. The Premier himself, all alone, the Minister of Education, with a nod from the Premier, can make these decisions and there will be no public consultation, no public debate and no vote in this place. So we should welcome every opportunity we have to have some discussion of the future of our most precious value, which is education.

I think that's what, for me, is so frightening about this government and its agenda, that it is step by step taking all control of education, eliminating effective voices of opposition, whether it is in this House or whether it's at the local level, whether it is by neutralizing the voice of trustees by creating these mega-boards with no power locally, no local accountability, or whether it is by doing

everything they can to discredit and demean teachers so that teachers' opposition to an agenda that threatens the destruction of public education as we know it will be seen instead as a defence of the status quo by the people with a vested interest. In fact, the concerns expressed by teachers are the deeply felt concerns of people on the front lines who deliver education and who are committed to the future of publicly funded education.

I have to acknowledge that the government recently has been aided in its efforts to demean and demoralize teachers by the statements of the former NDP Minister of Education David Cooke, now co-opted by the government in its Education Improvement Commission, who has most recently said that teachers should get real.

I am concerned that last week, as we faced truly a crisis in education, instead of truly being conciliatory, the Premier of the province said, "We can't trust teachers and trustees because they've negotiated class sizes up in return for salary increases." That is not a justifiable charge. It is not based on fact. The government knows that and it has deliberately refused to present the realities of what is happening to class sizes right across this province as a direct result of cuts: that we have large class sizes now because we are trying to keep junior kindergarten, that we have had the loss of special education even where class sizes have gone up and that we've had the loss of teacher-librarians, a direct effect of the cuts to date.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marion Boyd): Member for Fort William. Order. There are too many conversations that are interrupting the speaker. She was respectful of the other speakers and I would like everyone to respect her right to speak in this place.

Mrs McLeod: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I heard yesterday from an elementary school principal from Scarborough who said that the smallest class size in a senior elementary school in Scarborough was 31, and that was a special education class.

Mr Wildman: Special ed?

Mrs McLeod: A special ed class. This is in Metro Toronto, where the government's direct funding cuts haven't hit yet. I believe this government's attempt to equalize funding without new dollars, without replacing the $533 million already taken out of education, will be disastrous to Toronto and Ottawa. This is not a question of rich Toronto and rich Ottawa versus the rest of the province. This is about meeting students' needs. Those needs are not being fully met now, not in these large classes, not in classes where there are not enough textbooks for the students, not when $533 million has been taken out and another $425 million in cuts from the social contract were confirmed by this government. Those cuts have been devastating to education outside Toronto and Ottawa. When this government brings in its funding formula without putting new dollars in, those cuts will be devastating to Metropolitan Toronto and to Ottawa as well.

Let there be no doubt that this government's agenda is not the improvement of education. This government's agenda is to take another $1 billion out of education.

This morning the Minister of Education came out of his talks with teachers and said, "Our agenda still is to deliver education at the lowest possible cost." I believe the students in Ontario deserve something better than the cheapest possible education. I believe that when this government wants to make it a question of trust, it's not a matter of being able to trust trustees and teachers, the people who have fought for public education on the front lines throughout Ontario history, it is a matter of not being able to trust this government with the complete control of education, because we have seen what they've done and we have seen what they want to do.

I shake my head in disbelief when I hear the Minister of Education talk about wanting a quality of education, when his cost-cutting proposals are all focused on cutting teachers out of the educational system. We know they were looking for 10,000 fewer teachers as a way of cutting dollars. We know that the proposals in Bill 160 are designed to give the Minister of Education and Michael Harris the tools to find the dollars they're looking for to make the cuts they're looking for to pay for their tax cut by cutting teachers and by taking teachers out of our classroom. You cannot deliver a quality of education to students without having qualified and committed teachers in our classrooms providing service to students inside and outside our classrooms.

Because I want my colleagues to have a chance to speak, I'm not going to go into all the details of what we're seeing with the impact of the cuts. I'm not going to go into the details of how many teachers will be lost if we replace teachers with unqualified teachers, how many volunteer hours of teacher time will be lost under this so-called heading of having teachers spend more time with students, when in fact they're talking about having thousands of fewer teachers in our classrooms working with students. That is not going to improve education. It certainly isn't going to improve education when this government moves to try and replace teachers with computers and have students with self-guided learning.

I want to just very quickly agree with one part of this resolution in which the proposal is, "Whereas Ontario teachers should enjoy all the rights to collectively bargain" at the local level. That is something which I have supported in the face of threats to that by this government and indeed threats to that by the previous government through the social contract. I still believe that the best solutions to our problems can be found at the local level, where people understand the local needs, the needs of their students, where they can respond with some flexibility to the needs of local students.

I know what will happen when this government mandates maximum class size without providing the resources to provide the teachers for those classes. Yes, we'll have a maximum class size all right, but we'll have that maximum class size in grades 1 and 2. We'll lose junior kindergarten because we won't be able to run junior kindergarten classes with few enough students to deliver a good program. We'll lose our special education classes because they have to run at much too small a teacher-pupil

ratio to survive with the minister's financial resources, given to support a maximum class size.

It is all a matter of money, it is all a matter of priorities, and clearly this government's priority is not education and it is not the needs of our students.

Those are just some of the concerns that I have, that parents have, that teachers have. Those are just a few of the concerns that those of us who really care about public education have about the Harris-Snobelen agenda for education, and those are just a few of the reasons why we believe that public education is at risk and why we will join with all of those who are ready to fight for it.

Ms Shelley Martel (Sudbury East): It's a pleasure for me to participate in this debate today because it's a very important debate. As we look at where we are now poised in the province of Ontario, which I believe is on the brink of a province-wide teachers' strike, it seems to me that this government has got to get its head around where it's going with respect to education and just how damaging the government's agenda with respect to the system has been so far and how much more damaging that agenda will be if Bill 160 is passed in its present form.

Given where we are right now, which is on the verge of a major confrontation with teachers across this province, it is about time the Minister of Education understood that he can't continue to operate in the way that he has, that this will not benefit students, it will not benefit parents, it will not benefit teachers. It's about time he sat down to bargain fairly, squarely, in a reasonable way with the people who provide important services to our children day in and day out in this province.

1600

It's about time the Premier of this province also took some responsibility and showed some leadership and admitted that his Minister of Education is not capable and not responsible enough to deal with this in an appropriate way. He himself should make a commitment, here and now, to sit down with the heads of the teachers' federations to negotiate with them directly, to talk about their concerns and to work towards building a system that will continue to respond to the needs of students in this province. He needs to show some leadership today.

We have put our resolution forward and I want to speak to some of the points in it in the brief time I have to comment.

First of all, we know that this provincial government intends to take yet another $1 billion out of the education system in this province.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton North): Wrong.

The Acting Speaker: Come to order, member for Brampton North.

Ms Martel: When Bill 104 was concluded, it was reported extensively in the newspapers that ministry bureaucrats had made it clear that the tools were now almost in place to take another $1 billion out of the system. We know that during the negotiations that have been going on between teachers' federations and ministry staff, those teachers' federation representatives have been clearly told by Ministry of Education staff that another $1 billion is coming out of this system. The only people who haven't heard that message appear to be the Conservative backbench. Everyone else has got that message loud and clear.

We are very concerned about that, because we have seen already the effects of the $800 million annualized funding which this government has taken out of education. This government said in the Common Sense Revolution that there would be no cuts to classroom funding, and the next thing this government did was to withdraw $800 million on an annualized basis from the education system.

The effects of that have been tremendous. This government has cut its funding to adult education. This government has cut funding for junior kindergarten. This government has cut funding to boards so that they in turn have had to make difficult decisions about then cutting special education, then cutting library services, then cutting art and music and a whole host of other services that used to be delivered in our classrooms across the province.

Mr Spina: Wrong. School boards did that.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Brampton North, come to order, please.

Ms Martel: That is what the effect of the $800-million cuts has been to date. Can you imagine, then, what the impact of a further $1-billion cut by this Conservative government will be to classrooms right across this province? We will wipe out junior kindergarten, we will wipe out adult education, we will wipe out special-ed.

Mr Spina: Wrong.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Brampton North, please come to order. I'm warning you for the last time.

Ms Martel: We will have children in classrooms with pupil-teacher ratios that will be impossible for any teacher, no matter how dedicated and qualified, to work with and deliver quality education in those classrooms. Those teachers will have no choice but to every day, day in and day out, teach to the middle and not be able to deal with children who have special needs from all other parts of the spectrum.

We are very concerned that where this government is heading is to take $1 billion more, because we are very concerned about the impact in classrooms across this province.

Our second point is that we firmly believe that the reason this government is headed down the road to a confrontation, towards a work stoppage, is because it wants to have some way to hide the $1 billion that it wants to take out of the system. It wants to have a fight with teachers, a confrontation with teachers. It wants to try and turn the public against the teachers. So under the quiet of night, under the cover of darkness, under the cover of a teachers' dispute and under the cover of parents' concerns with the dispute, this government will then take $1 billion more out of the system through the funding formula that we have yet to see because the government refuses to publish it.

That is why we are heading down this road, because the government wants a smokescreen. The government wants to be able to hide what it's going to do with respect to the cuts, and the government is desperately hoping that if it can pick a fight with teachers across the province, parents'

attention, students' attention, teachers' attention and the broader public's attention will be diverted from the issue of the cuts to the strike, that people's concerns will be with the strike.

I say to this government, do not be fooled. Parents, teachers, students are united in this fight. Everyone is concerned about another $1-billion cut to education. You won't get away with it under the cover of night or under cover of a teachers' strike. So why don't you stop your efforts for a confrontation and why don't you start to negotiate now so that we can put a better system in place that responds to the needs of students across the province?

Point 3 has to do with the removal by this government of the right of school boards to raise revenues locally. We were in this chamber last night dealing with second and third reading of Bill 158, which was a bill to restore the right of cottage owners in this province to vote for trustees in the next election. We had to restore that right because this government, in their haste to ram through Bill 104 to try to get some savings through that bill, took away the right of property owners to vote in the next election. This government removed a fundamental, basic, democratic right of thousands and thousands of cottage owners in this province, people who have had that right for years and years, because you were so sloppy and hasty and in such a big hurry that you cut that out through Bill 104. We stood in this House and through second and third reading moved Bill 158, an act which restores the right of those people to now vote.

But, you know, it is a false hope we are holding out to them and to other residential property taxpayers, because the fact is that those cottage owners and local ratepayers at the end of the day will not really be voting for trustees who will be in a position to make decisions about education at a local level.

The reason is that through the government's Bill 160, this government will take to itself all the power and all the decision-making with respect to curriculum development, with respect to the length of the school day, with respect to the length of the school year, with respect to the preparation time for teachers and, by the way, through that mechanism how many teachers will be in the system. All these important decisions, many of which have been made locally, that trustees have had some role in and that parents, through their voting rights, have exercised some role in, will be taken away and will be centralized here at Queen's Park and done in the back room by regulation.

That's what's happening. Power to make decisions affecting all our local schools will not be made by local trustees, will not be made by local taxpayers who vote for those trustees, but will be centralized in the office of the Treasurer, who by regulation will set the mill rate, and by extension will also be done by the Minister of Education, who will set and make those decisions by regulation for all those important issues that used to be dealt with locally.

While we spent time last night trying to restore votes to cottage owners because this government took that vote away, in essence all our votes are now going to be affected, because so many of the important decisions that should be made locally to respond to local education needs will now be taken from the hands of trustees, be taken from the hand of parents in a community and will be centralized here at Queen's Park, to be run by the bureaucracy and the Treasurer and the Minister of Education and Training. Someone needs to tell me how that is going to improve the quality of education in our communities across the province when local trustees and local communities can't even make essential decisions about how to deliver education locally.

We are also very concerned about the rights of teachers in this province to collectively bargain. In fact, I want to read to you the very specific point we make in the resolution. We say, "Whereas Ontario teachers should enjoy all the rights to collectively bargain terms and conditions of work that are enjoyed by other Ontario workers, including an unrestricted right to strike."

My colleagues in the New Democratic Party believe this is a fundamental right for teachers. It is a right that should be enjoyed by all workers in this province. At the end of the day, when parties are involved in collective bargaining and difficulties and impasses arise, then workers should have the right to withdraw their labour to try to get a deal. Workers should have that right.

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I tell you, workers do not take that decision lightly. Workers in this province know that when they make that crucial decision to go on strike, they have no idea how long they will be out. They have no idea that at the end of the day they might get a better deal. They take that chance because they know they have reached an impasse with their employer and they have no other way to try and get a deal, to try and get their concerns dealt with, than to withdraw their labour and hope there will be a change in the employer's position.

We believe that Ontario teachers should have and should continue to have that fundamental right. It should not be tampered with. We feel so strongly about it that we have put it into the resolution, because we want to force members of this assembly to make a choice today: Do you believe the same thing? Are you in favour of teachers' unrestricted right to strike or are you not? We will be very interested to see how people vote today, particularly people in the Liberal caucus.

I was encouraged to hear that the Liberal critic, the member for Fort William, agreed with this particular point in the resolution, and she made that clear, but I wonder what the response of the leader of her party is with respect to the unrestricted right of teachers to strike. In 1992, on May 7, to be exact, the leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Ottawa South, put a private member's bill into this Legislature, and on that day this assembly spoke to that private member's bill. I want to take a few minutes to tell you what it says because I think it's so important in the context of where teachers are presently poised in this province: on the edge of a confrontation, and I believe on the edge of a strike.

The explanatory notes read as follows:

"1. The bill requires the report of a fact-finder to be submitted to the teachers whose collective agreement is being negotiated for a vote by secret ballot. If at least two fifths of them" — 40% — "vote in support of the terms of settlement recommended in the fact-finder's report, the report becomes binding on the teachers for the purposes of making or renewing a collective agreement.

"2. The bill requires the report of a fact-finder to be submitted to the board for a vote at a public meeting of the board. If at least two fifths of the trustees composing the board vote in support of the terms of settlement recommended in the fact-finder's report, the report becomes binding on the board for the purposes of making or renewing a collective agreement.

"3. The existing terms of the collective agreement between a board and a branch affiliate are revised to provide for a term of operation of not less than two years. At present, collective agreements have a minimum term of one year.

"4. The bill prohibits a strike from commencing after the 31st day of October in the year in which a collective agreement expires.

"5. The bill prohibits a strike or lockout from lasting more than 20 school days, and deems the board and the branch affiliate to have agreed to refer any matters remaining in a dispute between them at the end of 20 school days to a selector for determination as set out in the act."

Let me quote directly from Mr McGuinty, because this is a very important point. As I said, we have put it in the resolution because we want to see how members in this House feel about teachers' unrestricted right to strike. The current leader, the member for Ottawa South, said the following:

"My bill does not extend the school year; it merely places limits on the number of days our students can be, as I say, evicted from the classroom, and I say they cannot be held out of school for longer than 20 school days. That's about the equivalent of a calendar month.

"It also goes on to say that it places restrictions on what part of the school year we can hold them outside the class. My bill says that no strike or lockout can begin after October 31, again reflecting the fact that students are more sensitive to lost class time in the latter part of a year.

"I also make the process governing the negotiations at the present time more settlement-directed, and I require that the fact-finder's recommendation, an impartial third party's recommendation, be voted upon by the union members — there's now no obligation that they do so — and I impose the same obligation on trustees: There's now no obligation on them to vote on this, so I require them to vote.

"To reflect the importance that society gives to educating our students, I say you only have to pass it by 40%. If 40% adopt the recommendation, then that will be deemed to be the party's position. I didn't come up with that number out of thin air. I got it from Ohio" — progressive — "and I understand that is a provision in other American states."

This is Ontario. This is not another American state. In Ontario, teachers should have an unrestricted right to strike. What the leader of the Liberal Party proposes in this private member's bill is essentially to allow a board to say: "We are going to hold out on teachers for 20 days, because we know that if we don't negotiate for 20 days, if we don't talk to them, if we don't come to a settlement, teachers are going to have to go back into the classroom and continue to teach and someone else will be left to make a decision about those contract details."

The leader of the Liberal Party also put forward in this bill, put forward in this Legislature — and thank God it was defeated — a proposal that teachers cannot strike after October 31 in any school year.

I say to you, what motivation is there for a school board to negotiate in good faith when that school board knows full well that after October 31 a teacher cannot exercise a right to strike? This is ridiculous. This has nothing to do with fair labour practices or with collective agreement or with bargaining rights. It takes away teachers' bargaining rights, because it sets restrictions on when they can actually strike and for how long.

The third point I want to make has to do with the fact-finder's recommendation. Where in a democracy did 40% become 50% plus one as a vote of the majority? It is unfair that we would revert to a 40% figure, either for the teachers who are out or for the boards, which are the employers and trying to put forward their position. It is unfair that only 40% should make a decision on behalf of the majority, the other 60%. In any democratic process and any democratic system, a majority is 50% plus one. It is incumbent upon everyone to recognize that. The only person it appears not to be incumbent upon is the leader of the Liberal Party, who would have 40% of either the teachers or of the boards to rule for the rest, the 60%.

It seems to me that what we have is not support, reflected in this bill of the leader of the Liberal Party, for teachers' unrestricted right to strike. In fact, we have a number of conditions he places which very much bar or impede or stop or halt or limit that right to strike.

No one could say it better in terms of his concerns about this bill than a colleague of the leader of the Liberal Party. Mr Phillips, the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, said it best when he responded to this particular bill. The member for Scarborough-Agincourt said the following:

"My problem with the bill is really that I don't think it will be effective in resolving the conflict between boards and their teachers, for a couple of reasons. First, my problem is that once you set a deadline on how long a strike can run, one side or the other, I'm afraid, determines it may be in its best interests to let the time run out and then the strike is over. Similarly, my concern with a date at which time the contract must be resolved, that is, October 31: The challenge there is that one side or the other determines it's in its best interests to let the clock run out until that date arrives and then the dispute is over."

To his credit, the member for Scarborough-Agincourt voted against the private member's bill put forward by the Leader of the Opposition.

We are here today and we have put this specifically in our resolution because we want to see where the leader of the Liberal Party stands. Does he stand for teachers and their unrestricted right to strike or does he stand for his Bill 14, which restricts the right of teachers in this province to strike? Where does the leader of the Liberal Party stand?

We are very concerned about the funding formula which this government refuses to make public, because we know there will be another $1 billion taken out of education. We are very concerned that this minister, day in and day out, refuses to commit to reinvesting any of the savings that come from education back into the system. He refused that again today.

We call on this government to withdraw Bill 160, to allow boards and teachers to negotiate local issues and to put forward to the public the funding formula so that we can see exactly how much money this minister wants to put into the important education system in our province.

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Mr Bruce Smith (Middlesex): It's certainly a pleasure to have the opportunity to add a few comments to the motion presented by my colleague from Algoma this afternoon. It has been interesting to listen to the comments from the member for Sudbury East, her observations and experiences with respect to the difference in policy position between her own party and the Liberal Party in this province.

I have to say at the outset that clearly the Minister of Education and Training has said we want to bring the highest-quality education system to this province, the best possible. The whole issue is not about money but about reinvesting in students and classrooms and teachers to ensure they have the adequate resources they need to deliver quality education —

Mr Spina: Put the money where it belongs.

Mr Smith: — and as my colleague adjacent to me has said, to put the money exactly where it belongs, and that is in the classroom.

From the outset it should be realized that the government has committed some $650 million in terms of capital construction improvements. To put that into a localized context, that equates to about 30,000 pupil places in this province. That's a fairly significant commitment in terms of ensuring that our students are moved from portables and substandard classrooms to classrooms that are conducive to positive learning environments.

We've provided $250 million through the spring budget with respect to early retirement incentives and to offer a rejuvenation program with respect to young teachers in this province. We've added an additional $100 million to OSAP. We've added $150 million with respect to the Ontario student opportunity trust fund. There has been a great deal of work taking place with respect to education reform across both the elementary-secondary and post-secondary panels.

This, as the resolution speaks to, is not about provoking work stoppage; it's about bringing a new system of education to this province. The Minister of Education has repeated on a number of occasions that his door is open. We're willing to discuss issues with the teachers of this province. Clearly, that policy has been articulated again by the minister and is one he continues to maintain.

That invitation remains today; it will remain in the future in terms of soliciting input from teaching professionals across this province, the very people who know the best way to deliver education, an opportunity for them to provide continued input in terms of the directions of education reform. I want to make it very clear that today that opportunity was realized, and we continue to solicit their input and welcome it into the future.

I know my colleagues from Durham-York and Quinte want to provide some comments as well with respect to this important motion we have before us. The motion itself speaks to a number of key themes, which are all very important. I recognize that the respected member for Algoma has placed questions that deservedly require some response, some of which, as I've alluded to, have been initiated.

The whole issue of funding in this province is one that needs to be addressed. All members of the House recognize that changes have to be made to the system we have. We have been seeking input from expert panels across the province since about May of this year on what their best advice would be for a new funding formula for education in this province. That consultation process expired in August of this year, and we are in the process of analysing the data and input we have received from experts in terms of where we want to go with education finance.

We're looking at how to accommodate pupils in our system, how to address special needs, how to address adult education in this province, all very important issues with respect to what people are experiencing currently in the system and what they want to experience and have provided for them in the future. Those are very important questions, and I know the issue of uncertainty is there.

In the interim we, the government of Ontario, have recognized that there will be some challenges presented to school boards in the transition period. That's why this year we will be funding up to $14 billion in education expenditures. That has been provided for the purpose of recognizing those transition challenges to carry us into the future.

Bill 160 does provide the Minister of Finance with the regulatory power to set the mill rate on education. We fully recognize that and feel it's an important part, a position we've clearly articulated from the outset about the government's intention to take control of education finance by establishing an education mill rate.

We have also said that once that mill rate is established, we are prepared to freeze it for approximately three years to provide for transition challenges that may occur in the interim. So we are recognizing that there's a need to be flexible. We are recognizing that there's a need to respond and listen to teachers. We heard their concerns

with respect to secondary school reform initiatives. We responded by addressing and responding to their advice by backing that process up.

We've heard from teachers in this province that they need not have their right to strike removed in terms of their contribution to a quality education agenda in this province. We agreed with that.

We've heard from vice-principals and principals in this province that they are leaders in the school setting, that they need not be removed from the federation of their choice to deliver on the quality agenda of education in this province. We recognized that and have agreed with them.

We also heard from teachers that we need not eliminate their right to affiliation with their union of choice. Again, that's an issue we heard from them and responded to and said, "Yes, we agree with you."

The focus of Bill 160, the focus of education reform in this province, is about bringing quality to the classroom. Certainly, we feel that the input we've received from teachers to date and that we expect to receive in the future will continue to provide us with the valuable information we need to realize the expectations that parents and students have about their education in this province.

Just to put it into context, there's a lot of concern. In my own office I know I receive numerous calls from teachers with respect to their current seniority rights and collective bargaining privileges. I would encourage them, because there is a great deal of confusion out there, to secure a copy of Bill 160 — I believe it's page 185-186 — to look at the transitional measures that address collective bargaining privileges, salary and benefits of teachers in this province. I would encourage them to take that upon themselves as we move to the public debate on this bill. As we move to that public debate, we will be advancing to a larger extent a better awareness of what's in fact in the bill so those areas of concern and confusion can be set aside. I encourage them to take it upon themselves to look to that. Do not solely rely on the information you're receiving. Certainly there's been opportunity to clarify a lot of information and misinformation that's out there.

As we move into public debate, some eight days of public hearings, I'd encourage all people to take full advantage of the opportunity to provide the government, the committee, the minister's office on an ongoing basis with their views and opinions with respect to Bill 160 and education reform in this province. It's a period of consultation that the government respects, and we'll continue to solicit input from people across this province.

To conclude my remarks — as I said, I have other colleagues who wish to provide some input on the resolution — I want to revisit some of the initiatives the Minister of Education and Training has been involved in since July 1997. Too often we get consumed in the debate of the day and forget about the many positive things that have been introduced with respect to education in this province.

We've seen the introduction of the College of Teachers. We've seen province-wide testing introduced. We've seen technology investments, up to $60 million. We've seen the introduction of a province-wide curriculum, and I think by and large most educators have responded very positively in terms of their viewpoints and acceptance of the new curriculum for math and language in the elementary panel. We've seen a very clear and consistent position about advocating a stronger role for school councils, a position that's articulated again in Bill 160. We've seen the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education establish a research and development challenge fund, some $3 billion over a 10-year period. We've seen the ongoing efforts in terms of secondary school reform and the challenges of bringing a new curriculum to secondary school in this province. We've seen Ontario's summer jobs program, some $42 million of investment, to support some 40,000 young people during the summer of 1997. We have seen the introduction of a standardized report card.

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We have seen the effort and the process we are in now to introduce a new education finance system, one my colleague from Brampton South mentioned in his speech in terms of the reviews we have seen consistently since 1950, where we need to go with respect to education finance.

We have seen the introduction of a cooperative tax credit to give a tax credit which would provide incentives to corporations to donate funds to post-secondary institutions. We have seen the introduction of the Ontario student opportunity trust fund. Last spring, contributions by universities and colleges were approximately $300 million. The provincial portion in terms of matching that contribution will reach $600 million. In my own riding, the University of Western Ontario has contributed $17.2 million to this fund, for a total of $35 million. That's good news for the students of the University of Western Ontario.

We have introduced the general education development, GED, for adult learners. We are looking, as the minister said today in reference to a question posed by a colleague of mine from Waterloo, in terms of apprenticeship reform. We recognize the need for technology investment and the need to modernize our apprenticeship system, which is some 30 years old. Again, we have addressed the issue of student assistance, and the whole issue of capital spending, which I alluded to earlier.

Those are but some of the many positive initiatives the Minister of Education and Training in this province has undertaken since June 1995. Those many positive initiatives serve very well as we move into a very difficult period, a very important period, in terms of reforming the education system for this province for the future.

Mr Gilles E. Morin (Carleton East): It has been said repeatedly, and it is clear, that what the government is doing is simply taking control of education to fund their 30% tax cut. They are trying to find savings in education at the expense of our young people and our own future. To improve public education requires more resources, not less. Cuts are being made to special education and junior kindergarten. People who want to make a better life for themselves have lost adult education classes to fund a tax cut. I can tell you, at that price I don't want it.

Of course changes are required, and some of the ideas put forward have merit. It's the atmosphere of blaming the teachers and the agenda of cost-cutting that is poisoning the process of change, so we're facing the possibility of a strike no one wants and no one will gain from.

Bill 160 has been fast-tracked so the government can fulfil its agenda as quickly as possible. This government does not tolerate opposition. It is hoping teachers will lie down and play dead, or in the words of Minister Snobelen, act like reasonable adults, but they cannot go obediently down your road, Minister, if they don't believe in where you are going.

This government has declared war on all fronts, from health care to municipal governance, and now education. I am convinced this government will eventually pay the price, but in the process we will all suffer. Let me assure you, no war is ever fought without casualties, without creating new problems, without destroying values that took years to build. People are trying to tell you that and you are not paying attention. The resulting frustration is understandable.

I have a problem with the government trying to imply that teachers are self-serving in their protest against Bill 160. Teachers are defending the integrity of their profession and the interests of their students. They understand better than most the implications of what the government is proposing.

For instance, the issue of prep time: Few of us appreciate the demands teachers have placed on them. Teachers have tried to explain that a good portion of the work they do for students falls under the prep time category — class preparation, marking tests, research into new approaches to subject matter, the coordination of resources, counselling of troubled students, colleague support.

A good school is a living thing, a haven for developing minds and young lives in transition. How many of us remember teachers who affected our lives because of their special care and attention when we needed them most?

In taking control of the education system, the government will be poised to destroy a culture. The minister's round table on technology and learning a few months ago suggested that after the basics were learned, students would rely on computers and the Internet to continue their education. But learning is not a mechanical process. Do we imagine we can plant an instructor in front of a group of students, flip a switch and transfer of knowledge takes place? Of course not.

So much of our learning experience depends on the rich and supportive environment that only creative, dynamic and inspired teachers can provide. Those teachers need flexibility to meet the needs of their students with sensitivity. Central control of their schedules and their use of time is counterproductive, yet the government feels it can control quality in this way.

We can make the system better, but only if we approach these discussions with goodwill towards all participants and a clear agenda. The minister's aggressive and confrontational style has now pushed teachers to the wall and we face the very real possibility of a strike. I cannot stress strongly enough that a strike would be a terrible thing for our children. They must not be used as pawns by either teachers or the government, who because of their majority hold all the cards in this debate.

Please, for the sake of the children, I ask the government to engage in this debate in good faith. Reach a compromise with teachers that will answer some of their concerns. We can reach a satisfactory conclusion to this very real crisis through flexibility and an openness to compromise. This is what I call good government, when you can come to a compromise and settle an issue without taking away the rights of our children to be at school and to be educated.

Mr E.J. Douglas Rollins (Quinte): It gives me great honour to stand up today and speak on opposing the motion made by the man from Algoma. In case he wasn't sure what I was going to support, I want to make sure I don't lead him astray.

From the first time we started campaigning previous to the last election, there was concern in the province of Ontario that some things were wrong with the system. The education part of it was one of them. Many, many of our taxpayers have complained bitterly over a long period of time that they didn't feel it was fair that they were paying taxes with no children in the school system, and that was the part of the tax bill that seemed to be already out of control. There was no control on it, it was escalating at a rapid rate and there seemed to be no ability to put the brakes on.

There was a large concern from those people, particularly the middle-aged and the older people who didn't have children in the system. Yes, they don't mind spending good money as long as those children get top-quality education, but I think over the long haul we have seen a lot of companies and we have had a lot of experiences of our own, not just mine or yours but of other people, that said the students weren't achieving the high quality of education.

Going back in my system, in the part of education I was lucky enough to have, and I feel very honoured with what I had, my mother, who only went to high school for one year was able to help me with most of my homework all the way through high school, because she received that kind of an education in that time.

Today, we have backed up on the education system. The system hasn't been able to produce the quality of education and the quality of learning that many of our students need when they work out in the world, particularly in the world of commerce and away from here.

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They keep stating on the other side, and some of the teachers, their concerns about unqualified teachers. I don't think too many of us can remember back and listen a little bit about some of the qualified instructors we had. We didn't understand them as teachers. They weren't known as teachers in the days when I went to school. Some of those people who looked after the bands, looked after motor mechanics, looked after some of the arts classes were not qualified teachers. Were they good teachers and

instructors? You bet they were. They were of the very best.

No way should we be able to take away the ability when a board needs somebody to come in, when a school needs somebody to come in and put that expertise in there, whether it be in the arts or whether it be in teaching about the new computer age. Those people are great instructors. Yes, they're not qualified teachers. Does the student benefit? Absolutely. As long as we can leave that door open so that those people can come into those things, I think it's very important.

I think the amalgamation of the boards — I know a lot of people say those dollars were being wasted when you stop and think that in a goodly number of boards 40% of those dollars do not reach the classroom. There's only 60%, in some boards, that is spent in the classroom. That is not high enough. We need a higher quality. We want to make sure the standards that we have there are good enough that those students can come out with the high quality of education they need.

Our Education Improvement Commission, as other speakers have said before me, has studied it and studied it and studied it. It's not that the teachers are wrong; it's the system that's out of gear. We have an awful lot of good teachers in the system, piles of them, and they are to be commended for the amount of work and the hours they put in.

We have students coming into the class today who are a lot different from when you and I went to school, because the students come from homes that are of a lot of different backgrounds than what the standard home was in our time. I'm saying that those teachers need all the support in that class that they can have. Maybe we need to have smaller classes. We want to make sure that the teachers and the unions are not able to bargain away the number of teachers in their class. Those things have to have a cap put on to make sure they stay.

We hear from the opposition continually that $1 billion is being removed from the system. In my time in this House, the only person I continually hear talk about a further $1-billion reduction from education is the member from Thunder Bay. Pretty near every day she talks about the $1 billion that's being taken out of the education system. The minister doesn't say it, nobody else says it, but that's the rhetoric we hear. It's not a fair thing to let the teachers know and let the people here in the province know that they are going to take another $1 billion out of the education system, when in fact it's only a hearsay number and it's not been said by either our minister or our Premier.

The College of Teachers is something that we as a government felt very strongly about. We thought that the College of Teachers should be put in place so that it can govern and listen to and judge their own people and to listen to see that those people meet the standards that they themselves would set and be part of. They were very reluctant to do that. I think the unions wanted the teachers not to allow that. I don't think it was as much the teachers' position that didn't want the College of Teachers as it was the union position. They felt the union could do that with its own agenda.

The thing about prep time: I delved into a little bit of the secondary school system. We have five classes in a day, of which one is made up of lunch. You have four classes left, of which one is a prep class. So we're teaching basically in the high schools three classes a day of about 73 or 75 minutes. If we add another 30 minutes to that school time per day, it doesn't seem like a lot of time, which is another 10 minutes on three different classes. That doesn't seem to be a lot of time for most people, when you say, "Have you got a couple of minutes to do something?" I don't think 10 minutes is a very long time to ask people to be there.

Are we short-changing our students when we take away from them and ask them to go to school only 185 days a year when they've got to compete with other students around the world who have in excess of 200 days? I think it's only fair that we can ask the teachers to bring up the standard, to move closer to the 200-day year. When you take 20 days a year out of a student's life, from the time they start until the time they finish, that's some 12 years that they go to school, it adds more than one full year of class. I don't think it's fair that a student is asked to compete in the world market today, out on the street, if they have been short-changed of having an instructor in front of them by at least a year.

Student achievement is extremely high and I think we have some excellent people, we have some very bright students, right at the very top of the whole list around the world. Those students are the ones who will make it on their own. They're the people who can make it, but it's the middle-of-the-road people we've got to be able to look after and manage. The vast majority of us fit into the middle of the road — not at the top, not at the bottom, but in the middle. Those people are being squeezed out and we've got to make sure those people receive that extra few hours of instruction per day, per year and all along the board.

I had the pleasure of doing a television show and met a person by the name of Bob Bonisteel. He's a teacher who has been very involved in Teachers for Excellence. It's something that was started in British Columbia by a lady who was a teacher. She felt that the teaching system had got out of gear and there wasn't enough excellence towards teaching to be put in together. He has become the representative of that group in Ontario. He started out a couple of years ago. There was only him to start with. He's now in a group of over 400. He agrees mostly with the things that this bill is trying to do because he realizes the thing that is most important at the end of the day is that the student, the end product of our education system, receives the best possible education in the system.

One of the other things we've had a lot of problems with is that we've got a system where it's not very even. We've got assessments in eastern Ontario — particularly in my riding — that are extremely low. We don't spend the dollars per student they do in some other areas. We're down around $5,400 a year per student and that is at the

low end. Can our students in my riding of Quinte expect to have the same education as a riding that is spending somewhere over $7,000? I don't think they can. We need to have the balancing of that field. I think that by taking the tax base the way we have, bringing it back down so we can put it a little bit more evenly across the province, we can establish a system where we can guarantee that the students in my riding or in any other small riding in Ontario will at least have an equal opportunity.

What we've got to be able to do is to make sure the people in the Ontario and that student in Ontario, regardless of whether they're paying a fair share of tax, receive a fair share of education. We've got to have a qualified teacher, we've got to have a qualified system and we've got to produce a qualified product.

I know our students don't need to be short-changed and it irritates me to no end to think that they say all the teachers are that way. I can tell you that in my office the phone calls are coming in at about 10 to 1 in support of what we're trying to do, teachers who phone me and say: "I'm embarrassed to picket your office, I'm embarrassed to be there, but don't hold it against me. I have to be there because the union wants me to."

Laughter.

Mr Rollins: If you don't want to hear it, I'll give you a tape of it. You can sit there and laugh about it but that's the truth. That's exactly what happens. Those are the kind of things that the people are afraid of. I think that's the kind of system —

Mr Wildman: I noticed that in Maple Leaf Gardens there were an awful lot of embarrassed people there. At last 20,000 were embarrassed.

Mr Rollins: The thing of it is, it's the same as the big crowd that was down there the other night. I'm sure that all 24,000 of them were teachers. I'm sure there wasn't.

Interjection.

Mr Rollins: Most of them.

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): We didn't see you there.

Mr Rollins: I missed you too.

Mr Pouliot: We were there.

Mr Rollins: They were there. I think these are the kind of things that we hear back in the ridings and these are the kinds of things that as members of Parliament, in trying to make a better system — is it the worst system in the world? No, it is not. Is it a fair system? Yes, but with a lot of broken parts in it and we want to make it better. With the things this bill will do, will it guarantee my grandchildren and the future grandchildren in this province the quality of education they are being charged for and being paid for and deserve to have.

1650

Mr Alex Cullen (Ottawa West): I'm pleased to join in this debate with respect to the opposition day motion that's being presented by the third party with respect to Bill 160. I stand here as a former trustee and as a parent who is active in his community and in his school, who ended up chairing his school advisory committee, who ended up going to school board meetings, thinking I could do better than those turkeys and becoming one of the turkeys, and so I was elected in 1982 to the Ottawa Board of Education and served until 1988.

That has been, I must say, one of the best experiences in my own political life. I've served on city council, I've served on regional council, I've only been in this chamber for less than a month or for about a month, but I can tell you that my time on the school board was one of my best times, the reason being that those people who work in the education system work to provide a level of service work for the public good.

Everyone agrees that education is a good thing, and we all may disagree on the techniques, on the approaches, on the priorities. I discovered in my time as a trustee that everybody is an expert on education, but very few people actually go into the classroom.

My experience back then was a very positive experience, because I believe I was working for the good of the community, for the welfare of our children.

This bill, Bill 160, An Act to reform the education system, protect classroom funding, enhance accountability, and make other improvements consistent with the Government's education quality agenda, including improved student achievement and regulated class size, is utterly repugnant to me.

If we were only talking about class size — but there's no mention of what class size is going to be — if we were only going to talk about the length of the school year — but we've seen the minister flip-flop on school year — then perhaps we might have a decent discussion, different points of view about what is best for our community.

What this bill does is take away the ability of the local community to work with their own resources and to meet local needs, to work with the teachers, the parents, the educators and come up with something that meets their children's needs. That is being taken away from all, throughout all of Ontario, and it's being vested in the hands of a body, of a minister, who is going to go via fiat, make these pronouncements and affect the working conditions, and when we say working conditions of teachers, we're obviously talking about the learning conditions of children. We're going to affect the learning conditions of children, affect their ability to provide service and take away a parent's ability to control that.

People speak on the other side that parents will have an ability to manage what is left in terms of the classroom. Well, good luck. What this does is it removes the professionalism in the classroom by permitting — I have to say Egerton Ryerson would today roll over in his grave to see a government such as this take away professional qualifications for people who will then be standing in front of a classroom dealing with our young. This is totally, totally wrong. We want to have the best kind of people there.

I don't have enough time to talk about all the issues that find me in absolute opposition to this bill, this power grab that's solely designed to take money out of the classroom, but I have here yesterday's editorial from the Ottawa Citizen, "How to Avert a Teacher's Strike," and it's in two parts. One speaks to the Ontario teachers' unions,

"Levelling with the Public," and it takes a strip off the teachers' hide. The other is a memo to the Premier, and it says here, "Fire Mr Snobelen."

I have to tell you that I agree with Conrad Black's paper here, the Ottawa Citizen, the major paper in my community. They are completely right. This absolute power grab, this absolute trying to set, from Toronto, a one size fits all policy — do you know that the provincial average for spending on education per pupil is around $6,000? I think you know that.

What is it in Ottawa-Carleton? It's around $8,000. What's going to happen when you take that money down? What's going to happen to the kids with learning disability? It ain't all administrative costs, let me tell you. That's less than $800 out of the $8,000. So kids with learning disability, our vocational schools, our art schools, our ability to provide specialized programming, all go out the window to meet this provincial average.

This is money that taxpayers in Ottawa-Carleton were willing to pay, using the democratic process, to set those standards because we haven't received any public funding for more than four years. It's all come from the local property tax base, all democratically elected. You're taking that ability away from them and it's wrong.

Mrs Julia Munro (Durham-York): It's certainly my pleasure to rise today and speak to this motion. I think education is one of those issues all of us have a particular concern about, whether we are here as a parent, whether we're here as a former teacher, whether we're here as a concerned citizen. But I think that there are a number of extremely important issues that this motion raises for us.

Very clearly, the government has made its commitment to quality classroom education. When you look at the experience we have had in this province over the past few years, it becomes very clear that quality classroom education is the critical piece in providing a successful experience for our children.

There are a number of issues and I have time to hit on a couple of those. One of them has to do with the issue of cost. According to the Sweeney report and regardless of how the Sweeney report considered what was inside the classroom, it became clear there was a tremendous discrepancy in the amount of money that was spent in the classroom.

Sweeney identified 10 boards with the lowest percentage of classroom spending, at around 54%. That suggests to us then that just over half the dollar went to the classroom. The 10 boards with the highest per cent of spending were at 67%. So not only are we seeing the fact that there is an enormous discrepancy in the amount of money that goes to the classroom, this clearly suggests a tremendous inequity.

One of the previous speakers identified the amount that is spent on a per student basis, but in our allocation model it becomes very clear that money is directed. It goes to the classroom. The foundation grant that becomes the base for the allocation model means that all of those major issues that are found in the classroom, whether it's the teacher, the teaching assistant, preparation time, textbooks and supplies, classroom computers and other resources, including librarians and guidance counsellors and the school-based administration, the become part of that foundation grant.

There are other special grants, and many speakers today have tried to suggest the spectre of decreased funding for special education and the kinds of cuts that have been imposed on boards or on classrooms across the province. This speaks directly to the need for this kind of special purpose funding that would allow and ensure that every child across the province has access to those same dollars.

I think that the issue then of classroom spending is a critical part of this whole legislative initiative.

One of the other areas we hear a great deal about is the question of limiting class size. It has become clear that the way in which the funding has been done traditionally has allowed boards to determine class size regardless of the kinds of merit to smaller classes, regardless of making sure those dollars flow to those classes.

There's also been a history of a great deal of confusion regarding what is the pupil-teacher ratio in this province, a number that might suggest, say, 17 students per teacher, but in fact you can't find a classroom that has those numbers. We have to look at what is a much more accountable system, where we're looking at average class size as opposed to a pupil-teacher ratio number that is totally misleading.

1700

One of the other areas that has been given a great deal of attention is the question of focusing on teachers' expertise in the classroom. The Education Improvement Commission provided us with information regarding the number of hours spent in the classroom in comparison to other jurisdictions. I think something that is overlooked in all of this discussion is the fact that teachers began teaching because they wanted to teach, not because they wanted a great host of other responsibilities. If we look at the non-teaching burden that has been placed on teachers by their own administration, by boards, it has increased tremendously. I think the EIC recommendation of increasing the amount of time spent in the classroom allows us, to look at some of those increased non-teaching responsibilities.

One of the other areas that I think of as part of this is the fact that teachers wear many hats today. Society has come to see the classroom teacher as someone who can deliver a great many of society's responsibilities, whether they are quasi-parents, whether they're taking on the role of a psychologist, whether they are doing many more functions than what we regard as strictly classroom responsibility. I think it's in recognition of those kinds of things that we need to look at the opportunity and in fact the need to provide other people in the school setting.

We have a long tradition of teaching assistants and parent volunteers, certainly in various specialty areas. I know in my own experience that the art teachers would have potters and people like that come in and provide opportunities for students that they wouldn't otherwise have. We've also seen opportunities for sexual assault counselling and, again, very specialized areas that cer-

tainly go to aid the student and speak directly to the need for that kind of access to specialists that students today require. Some of those issues speak directly to a very long history of the kinds of problems we have in our system today.

A number of speakers have raised issues about the possibility of any impact in terms of the numbers of teachers. I think it would be interesting to have a look at the most recent edition produced by the Ontario College of Teachers. In their September issue, one of their lead articles says, "Teachers' career prospects are much brighter as the new century dawns." In this, they provide a number of examples of the pessimism that surrounds the profession today and what are in fact the increasing numbers of retirements, the natural attrition and the opportunities for our young people in this profession. They make a couple of statements that I think are worthy of our attention. One of them is that "It's time for the word on the street to catch up with this swing in demand for new teachers." So there are certainly some opportunities, as they proceed to identify for us.

One of the areas I would like to close on here is to come back to what is essentially driving this, and that is simply the need to provide quality classroom education for our children and grandchildren. The minister and the Premier have made it very clear that the allocation model is designed to make sure the money that is necessary will be there.

We recognize that there are many adjustments that have to be made to be able to come up with a fairer funding system. There are adjustments to be made that will make sure that our teachers do have opportunity within their classrooms, which is, as I mentioned, where they have looked at the fact that they have had this ongoing and tremendous burden of responsibility well beyond the classroom.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that we are looking at many of the issues that have been raised by this resolution and remain committed to the classroom of the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Further debate?

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-Walkerville): I'm pleased to join this debate. I will be voting in favour of the resolution.

The resolution states quite clearly that the government ought to withdraw Bill 160, and we on this side of the House certainly can't differ with that sentiment. There is no question in my mind that the government's intention has nothing to do with improving educational quality. It has everything to do with finding $1 billion in order to fund the tax cut that they've promised and committed to all of their friends.

The idea of restoring the right to local school boards and teachers' federations to negotiate local quality learning conditions, how can you disagree with that? I believe that the government, in its attempts to find efficiencies, will in fact create inefficiencies in attempting to centralize the governance of education.

I did a quick check with our city clerk today and found that in many wards in our city no candidates have filed to run for school board. The government's creating a large, centralized bureaucracy. Whether you live in Windsor or Thunder Bay or Napanee, you're going to have to deal directly with Toronto instead of your local officials, and your local officials won't be able to respond to the needs of your community without first getting permission from Big Brother in Toronto. The chances of that Big Brother governing education in this province well and efficiently are slim to none, and certainly in my view they will not be able to ensure a quality education that's driven by local needs and concerns.

The request to make public the new funding formula and the exact dollar amounts only makes sense, and we can only assume that the government has refused to make those figures public because it doesn't want people to know in their own communities how much is being cut out of their schools, what's being taken away. Is it going to be teachers? The minister says 4,400 at least. The teachers' federations say 10,000. Whom do we believe? I'd take the teachers' federations over the government any day on those numbers.

This was the government that wasn't going to close hospitals. This was the government that wasn't going to take money away from local policing. This was the government that wasn't going to affect classroom education in a dollar-and-cents manner. So I'd believe their numbers certainly before I'd believe the government's numbers.

We ought to focus on issues of education quality and education improvement, and we ought to involve teachers, we ought to involve parents and we ought to involve students. It only makes good sense. Instead, once again we have a government that's intent on creating confrontation, on drawing a line in the sand and saying, "It's us versus them." We think it should be all of us working together to improve classroom education for our students today and into the future.

I can understand the government's consternation for this resolution, understanding full well that Dave Cooke is the author of much of what this government's doing in the field of education. Mr Cooke has been consistent from his days in government. He's been consistent about school boards. He had no use for them, wanted to reduce school boards. I remember that very clearly. I remember he appointed Tom Wells in Essex county to study the Essex county board's reconfiguration. Mr Wells came out with an opinion that didn't agree with Mr Cooke's and he went ballistic. He didn't accept Mr Wells's conclusions because he felt, as the NDP government did, that there ought to be fewer school boards, there ought to be more central control.

1710

We can certainly understand the NDP's desire to return to a system of free collective bargaining, a system that was taken away under the social contract. I remember full well the impassioned pleas of the member for Welland-Thorold when that government introduced the social contract, the labour government that stripped collective

agreements, the government of working people that took it upon itself to undermine the very tenets of free collective bargaining. I remember those days very well.

I remember just weeks ago Mr Cooke saying that teachers ought to get real. My goodness, he was just sitting over there not long ago. We've seen it, haven't we, a complete chameleon. They're wearing a different skin now. Gone is the party that stripped contracts. Gone is the Minister of Education who argued passionately for reduced school boards. Gone is the Minister of Education who wanted to reform classroom education. Where has that NDP minister gone? He's gone to help the current government.

Understandably, the government doesn't quite know what to do about this resolution. They were colleagues until a mere several months ago. The member for Windsor-Riverside had Mr Cooke's picture on his Web page, saying what a great job he had done, what a great job he did in closing down school boards and stripping collective agreements.

We will vote for this resolution, but we can understand the government's consternation at the party of chameleons, as the former NDP Minister of Education gives the government advice and guidance on how to deal with educational questions in this province. We can certainly understand your confusion, but we have to vote for the resolution none the less.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Port Arthur): I'm very pleased to join the opposition day debate today calling on the Harris government "to withdraw Bill 160...to restore the right to local school boards and teachers' federations to negotiate local, quality learning conditions for Ontario students." I look forward to supporting this resolution later this afternoon.

Much has been said inside this Legislature and outside, at the many rallies that have been held over the past week or so, about the quality of our education system and the extraordinarily important role teachers play in the lives of the children of this province.

Despite Minister Snobelen's insulting attitude towards our teachers, I believe the people of this province have the highest regard for those who take up this challenging, onerous, yet remarkably satisfying profession.

For my part, and I'm sure this is true for all members of the Legislature, my life was very positively affected by the people who taught me. They inspired me, they encouraged me, they sometimes criticized me, but I think they saw something in me, for which I will be forever grateful. I want to use my remarks today, if I may, as a tribute to teachers and as a positive reflection of the influence they have and how we need to treat them with great respect.

One doesn't get a chance very often in life to thank those people, but today I want to acknowledge some of them, some of them living, some of them deceased, but all of them passionately devoted to the art of teaching. When I think back on my school years and how they developed my life, I think of Sister Aloysius in grade 1, the first and last person to give me a strapping, and I think I learned a lesson from that. I think of Miss Stewart in grade 2, a tough disciplinarian but a wonderful model for me; Miss Kruzel, who taught me the love of music — she's now Mrs Seerik — in grades 3 and 4; Miss Halford, now a good friend of mine; June Baker in Thunder Bay, and teaching English as a second language in Japan, my grade 5 teacher. I think of Mr Joe Baratta in grade 7, who taught me how to throw a football — a tremendous man. The influence of these people in my life was extraordinary.

I think of my high school teachers: Mr Stinson, who taught me a true love of literature; Ms Campbell, again music; Mr Merritt in science; and Harry Smith, a legend of history classes at Port Arthur Collegiate Institute.

These people devoted their lives to helping me and so many others grow up believing in ourselves, and I think that's so important. I don't believe any of those people are still teaching today, but there are so many others who are hurt and outraged by this government's attack on the teaching profession, and those are people I know very well, people like my sister, Susan Houghton, presently a guidance counsellor at R.L. Graham Public School in Keswick.

I spoke to my sister today and I asked her how she felt about this horrible situation, and I asked her what I could say on her behalf and on behalf of so many of the other fine people who work in our education system. My sister, Susan Houghton, born Susan Gravelle in Thunder Bay — she taught in Thunder Bay, North Bay and, for the past 10 years, in York region — asked me to quote her directly. Speaker, with your indulgence, that's exactly what I will do. This is what my sister said:

"I'm passionately committed to my profession. It would be easy to be overwhelmed by the constant negative barrage of derogatory comments by the education minister, the feeling of being bullied and harassed, all of which we, my peers, try to redirect our students from on a daily basis.

"In our school, we value open and positive communication, mutual respect and learning.

"Why am I qualified to do this work, Mr Snobelen?"

"Well, the fact is my education, my life experiences and my willingness and desire to continually upgrade my professional skills allow me to be a qualified guidance counsellor today.

"I teach, I counsel children and families. I support my peers. I search for community partnerships that will nurture students, partnerships like a breakfast program" — every day she is there by 7 am — "a school and school council partnership, early intervention service workshops, the Blue Hills child and family services program, and parenting courses."

My sister Susan goes on:

"I am but one voice and my commitment to the children is matched and surpassed by many teachers across the province. And yes, Mr Snobelen, since I'm going to be 50 years old this coming October 13, I guess that in your eyes I am now defined as elderly. But does that in fact mean that I should be viewed as no longer useful and therefore worthless as a teacher? Because, Minister, that's the message you send every day."

Obviously I know and love my sister, and let me tell you, her energy and enthusiasm are remarkable, so on behalf of Susan Houghton, her colleagues in York region and all the teachers, students and parents that I so proudly represent in my home town of Thunder Bay, I call upon this government to withdraw Bill 160 and give teachers the respect they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Marilyn Churley): Further debate?

Mr Spina: In the one minute that we have left for our portion of this debate, I am pleased to offer a comment, and I am pleased that your previous substitute saw fit not to remove me from the Legislature.

I was looking at the motion from the party leader and I really had a problem with the first part. It said that the provincial government intends to take a further $1 billion away from the education of the children. That's not true. The reason it isn't true is that they claim the first $1 billion was already removed from the system. Not so. The first $400 million or $500 million was removed in 1995. Any further reductions were deferred, were scrapped entirely because it was felt that restructuring the system was a greater priority. That was the objective and that still is the objective of this government: to help the system restructure and become a more effective system, because the teachers have not failed the system, the system has failed the teachers.

1720

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough North): I don't know if it is pleasurable to speak on this, but I wanted to grab this opportunity to support this opposition day motion that is before us. I think it's well-timed and deserving of all the support of members. Now is the time that the opposition, the government people and the back bench are able to express themselves openly and vote for this motion.

We know what this bill is all about, the concern of this government. It's about $1 billion taken out of the education system. Now they're cornered. The bottom line is they need the $1 billion because they want to balance the budget, as they would put it, or to give this money to their rich little friends outside there. It has nothing to do with education. As a matter of fact, the only part about education is to destroy education in its form just because of the blindsided way they look at things.

We know that this is all about power, too. Their legislation on education is about power, to control everything. It started, as you remember, with Bill 26. This bill, Bill 160, as we know it, is the son of Bill 26, the big bully bill. This is the schoolyard bully bill now, that decided to gut education.

A couple of days ago I was down at Maple Leaf Gardens. Those who missed the 24,000 people, who were not a part of that — I didn't see one Tory member there. It's unfortunate they did not represent any of their teachers within their constituencies, who came to give a very clear message to the government: first, that they don't like to strike. They don't like illegal strikes. What they want is a good education for their students, and they will fight for that. I commend them for doing that. But not one Conservative member was there. I had hoped that I would see one or two of them who would have the moral guts to say, "I would not like our education system to be gutted by that $1-billion power grab," that their government is about. You could say that in a gentle way. They did not say that.

I want to say I do support this motion. I welcome this motion. It's a good opportunity in which to do so. Many opportunities were given to this government. Today teachers met with the minister. We thought that somehow he would have seen the light and then sat down with these teachers, but before he got there his boss, the big bully, Mike Harris, told him that he will not negotiate with teachers because they don't set any policies. He knows what is right. It's unfortunate we don't live in a democratic society where we can all participate, where we can see laws that reflect us. Teachers and students would be able to say, "That law reflects us," especially in education.

My constituency is one of the most culturally diverse communities, I would say, in this country. Today I went to the opening of a school, the breaking of ground. There were 200 students there from junior kindergarten to grade 7. I saw almost 50 different nationalities there. What this government is doing is they would like, they say, to get rid of all the teachers, slide them out of the system so we can get younger teachers in, with less experience. We need more experience with this diversity. But this government, which is blind about what they want to do — all they want to do is grab $1 billion out of the system, the grab of power to show who has the strength. I would say to you that we will come to a point in time when people will replace you all.

I'm in strong support of this resolution today. I hope that many of those backbenchers will get an opportunity to do so too.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I too would like to join in support of the resolution and just say to the public that what we are witnessing in Ontario in the education system has the potential to do irreparable damage to our quality of life in Ontario.

I used to be chairman of the Scarborough school board; I was chairman of the Metro school board for four years. I can guarantee you that one of the reasons Metropolitan Toronto has worked so well — and it is, by all accounts, a model of urban living certainly in North America, if not the world — is because of the quality of education. You can live in any neighbourhood in Metropolitan Toronto and be assured that your local school offers quality education.

I've been with a Conservative member, Mr Gilchrist, who says we're spending far too much money on the schools in Metro Toronto, the city of Toronto is out of control, we have to get control of this. We have never seen a government that is grabbing control like Mike Harris's. He now has complete control of the education system. I will say to the people of Ontario and the area that I happen to represent in Metropolitan Toronto that this government is going to do serious damage to our neighbourhoods

across Ontario and the neighbourhoods I know well, particularly in Metropolitan Toronto.

People say, "Well, how do you know he wants to grab $1 billion?" He spelled it out. Mike Harris spelled it out in the Common Sense Revolution. They're planning to cut — this is the revolution — $1.5 billion from education: $500 million from post-secondary and $1 billion from elementary and secondary schools.

I hope the public understands the fight we're in here. It is a fight around the quality of education, and the government is provoking a fight with our teachers; I think an unnecessary fight. What the fight is all about is that Mike Harris wants to get his hands on substantial cuts in expenditures for education that have nothing to do with the quality of education in our schools. Why it's so serious, and I say this again, is that I can guarantee you that one of the plans is to gut the quality of education in Metropolitan Toronto and to gut the support. Many of our schools in Metropolitan Toronto require special assistance. They have unique needs in their communities — needs around many new Canadians, needs around inner-city schools. We have been fortunate in Metropolitan Toronto that we have been able to provide the resources in those schools. Mike Harris is all about taking those resources away.

I'm with the teachers on this. I know their backs are to the wall. The last thing they want is a strike, for a whole variety of reasons. They understand the inconvenience to the public. They understand that students are put in a difficult spot here. But what are they to do? The government will not listen. The government will not listen to reason. The government is imposing changes, changes they never said before the election they would impose.

This is the next step in this revolution, this so-called Common Sense Revolution. I think the people of Ontario are now seeing the cold, hard face of the revolution, whether it be in our health care system, where now people are finding the emergency wards simply can't handle them, or whether it be in dumping social costs on to property tax, which nobody thinks makes sense. Dave Crombie, whom Mike Harris handpicked to study this, said, "Don't dump social housing," but Mike Harris decided to do that. Why? Because he wants to pick a fight in the educational system and this allows him to get complete control of education.

I will say to the people of Ontario that for the whole history of Ontario we have selected local people to ensure that we have a local sensitivity in our schools. What's happening is that Mike Harris now has complete control over our schools. He controls the budget, he controls the working conditions for our teachers — and by the way, that has always been bargained. Now Mike Harris wants to, with the stroke of a pen, say, "No longer, teachers, will you be allowed to have a say in working conditions." I know from experience that many times the teachers have given up salary increases for smaller class sizes, but that will not be an option. Mike Harris now has his hands completely on our education system. That's a bad mistake.

Mr John C. Cleary (Cornwall): I appreciate this opportunity to speak in opposition to Bill 160.

When Minister Snobelen introduced the bill, on September 22, he issued a direct challenge to the Ontario teachers. He proposed to reduce education funding, teachers' preparation time and professional development days, while also increasing class sizes and the number of non-qualified instructors, in exchange for increased government control over the public education system.

In response to this challenge, parents and teachers from across Ontario have made phone calls, faxed our offices, written letters and petitions, and met with members of the Legislature in an attempt to try to get the government to slow down and listen to the residents of Ontario.

In the greater Cornwall area, residents have expressed anger and frustration over this piece of legislation a number of times. A note from Mrs Betty Eadie, president of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Women Teachers' Association, states: "A great deal of money has already been taken from the education system. To cut an additional billion dollars will hurt the classroom and it will affect the quality of publicly funded education in Ontario." Mrs Eadie continues: "We are deeply concerned about class sizes increasing, the use of unqualified people as teachers in the classroom, and the lack of resources available to schools. Cheaper will not be better."

A local teacher, Ms Francis Webb, writes, "The proposed changes will not only undermine the quality of education in this province, but will also cause long-term effects impossible to measure" at this time.

In addition to telephone calls and letters of concern, Cornwall area residents have expressed their opposition to Bill 160 through many rallies and protests as we saw here on September 25 at 12 pm.

Minister, teachers in my area, as well as the rest of Ontario, now feel that there is no option but to strike in reaction to this offensive legislation. Mrs Ariane Carriere, president of the SD&G Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association states, "If teachers go on strike, it will be to protect a system of education that we care about deeply. If teachers go on strike, it will be as a last resort."

Residents of the greater Cornwall area demand that you withdraw this legislation. The quality of Ontario's public education system must not be sacrificed in order to meet your fiscal goals.

Mr Bernard Grandmaître (Ottawa East): I have only a few minutes, but I want to oppose Bill 160 for a number of reasons.

I can tell you that I was disappointed today when the minister was asked to report to this House what had happened this morning between the teachers — the syndicate — and the ministry. The minister didn't want to oblige, didn't want to tell us how close they were to preventing this strike, a strike that nobody wants.

As you know, teachers have been blamed for a number of things in this province for maybe too long and now the government is determined to go ahead. Now that they've closed hospitals and they're going ahead with closing schools and amalgamating municipalities, they're doing this with one thing in mind, and that's to balance their budget. As you know, they have to pick up the money

somewhere to satisfy their $5-billion-a-year tax cut that is given to the rich people, and that's one way of doing it.

I think it's impossible, by cutting back the Ministry of Education — they've already cut back $533 million and they intend to cut an additional $1 billion. How can this minister, how can this government improve the quality of education in Ontario by cutting back 5,000 or 10,000 teachers and limiting the number of students per classroom? It's impossible to do.

As I said only last week, this government is supposed to create 12 additional French-language school boards and I'm just wondering where they're going to get the money to do this. Now that they want to control the taxation part of education at the municipal level, it will be practically impossible. What they are doing is impoverishing not only the public school system, but they're impoverishing the separate school system.

This government started out by creating a crisis in education. Now they're provoking the teachers in the province and they're not doing anything to prevent a strike. Naturally it's easy to blame the teachers. Mr Harris and the minister are saying: "They're overpaid. They can't be trusted with the agenda of education." How can we resolve the possibility of a strike when teachers are being provoked not only by the minister, but also by the Premier of this province? I think it's unfair.

I think there is room for negotiation. Right now the government wants to cut back preparation time by 50%, and it can be negotiated.

I just want to say that what we are about to vote on is very important, and I am totally against Bill 160.

Ms Annamarie Castrilli (Downsview): It's ironic that yesterday marked World Teachers' Day. That very same day this government celebrated by shafting education to a terrific extent. They rammed through Bill 160 despite growing opposition.

We know that teachers have rallied all over the province, some 90,000 strong. Parents have demonstrated. Students have been frustrated and have engaged in a number of demonstrations. In Toronto alone we've had 25,000 teachers, an unprecedented number, fill Maple Leaf Gardens to the rafters to protest the activities of this government.

Parents, I think, have been the angriest. I was quite struck this morning by an article in the Toronto Star about Annie Kidder, who is one of the founders of Parents for Education, a group, by the way, that was formed because this government would not listen to parents. She talks about the 20 pages of notes she made about this piece of legislation. Imagine a parent taking the time to write 20 pages of notes and finding this piece of legislation wanting, undemocratic and contrary to the interests of children.

Students have taken to the streets again. Articles have abounded of school after school that has had children, here and elsewhere, walk out to protest the kind of activities this government has foisted on them. They are worried that education is not the issue at all.

I'd like to read to you a letter, or parts of it, from the secondary students' association. They are very forceful in stating:

"Students are particularly opposed to the reduction of teacher preparation time which will result in teachers having less time to prepare for classes, participate in extracurricular activities or provide extra help for students.

"We are also concerned with the speed with which the bill is being passed through the Legislature. We feel that more time should be allotted for consultation with all concerned parties, including students."

That's a refrain we've heard over and over again: You're going too far, you're going too fast, you're not listening to anybody and you make mistakes, and trust me, this is a big one you've made here.

Why? Time is very short. One could go on at great length with respect to this, but the main reason is that Bill 160 is an authoritarian piece of legislation. It would take away from communities the right to determine the kind of education their children need and vest all the powers in the cabinet, in the Minister of Education, in the Premier to do all manner of things by regulation; determining class sizes, determining who could teach, determining what kind of special education there would be. It is an unprecedented grab of power, once again, for this government.

The worry is that this has nothing to do with education, but in the guise of reform, what the government is really trying to do is take $1 billion out of education, away from our children, and give it to the wealthiest people in this province. You're becoming inured to this. You say, "Oh yes, we've heard this before." But isn't it the truth? How long does it take for us to repeat the message? How many times do we have to do it until you finally get it through your heads that what you're doing is damaging, what you're doing is pandering to your own and what you're doing is causing children in this province to suffer? What's more, you're playing with our future, because it is in education where lies a promise of progress for Ontario and for Canada. Quite frankly, you should be ashamed of yourselves.

I only want to say one more thing, and I will give the last word again to the students. The Ontario secondary school students' federation reminds us, "The needs of the students must not be compromised and our education must not suffer." Pay attention to that message. It will come back to haunt you if you don't.

1740

Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott et Russell) : Tout d'abord je veux dire que c'est impossible pour moi d'appuyer ce genre de projet de loi. Si on regarde ce qui c'est déjà passé avec d'autres projets de loi, le gouvernement a certainement quelque chose de caché dans ce projet de loi. Regardons ce que vont devenir les petites écoles en Ontario.

Nous savons qu'avec ce projet de loi, le gouvernement aura le pouvoir, le ministre aura le pouvoir de fermer de petites écoles secondaires. Quand je dis «fermer de petites écoles», c'est que nous regardons ce qui est arrivé avec de petites municipalités. Nous avons procédé à l'amalga-

mation des municipalités et aujourd'hui on a dit que c'était pour réduire les coûts d'administration. Vous verrez dans trois, quatre ans.

Maintenant nous allons amalgamer les petites écoles secondaires de langue française surtout dans le secteur rural. Qu'adviendra-t-il aux écoles d'Embrun et de Rockland ? Est-ce que nous allons avoir une fusion avec les écoles de Plantagenet et de Casselman ? Personne ne le sait, mais tout cela voudra dire un transport additionnel pour les étudiants. De plus en plus, nous entendons dire que le gouvernement voudrait donner la responsabilité du transport scolaire aux municipalités. C'est à venir.

Chers amis, lorsqu'on regarde dans le domaine des cours spécialisés dans nos écoles, est-ce que nous allons avoir les moyens nécessaires pour avoir en place le personnel pour donner ces cours ? Nous savons que dans le secteur rural, nous avons toujours un grand besoin de ce service. Aucune vision pédagogique chez ce gouvernement.

Donc, dans ce cas-ci je crois que nous devons tous être contre ce projet de loi. Je regarde et je vois que le gouvernement est définitivement en train de réduire par 1 $ milliard la contribution dans le secteur scolaire. Encore une fois, c'est quelque chose qu'il faut regarder.

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I appreciate the opportunity to wind up debate on our opposition motion today, an opposition motion on education. For those people who may be wondering why an opposition motion on education, it's very clear that we are headed for a confrontation in this province. We are very likely headed to a situation where teachers across this province will be forced out on strike, and I want to underline why that is happening. I want to underline this government's course of action with respect to education over the last two years.

The first thing the Minister of Education did, just weeks after being sworn in, was to tell Ministry of Education officials that they had to find a way to create a crisis in education, that he could not justify tearing the education system down unless he could find a way of creating a crisis. Some agenda.

Then the Minister of Education launched a persistent and a consistent campaign to create that crisis by badmouthing teachers across the province, by badmouthing our schools, by calling our students mediocre. In the process, he lost the trust of parents, students, teachers, support staff and anyone else who cares about the quality of education. But that doesn't bother him. He has clearly had his eye on the ball throughout this in terms of the media, in terms of repeating a message over and over every day. He has consistently and persistently for two years repeated that message: "There is a crisis in education. The system is broken. We are the caboose of the train. Ontario students are mediocre." The message has been repeated by this Minister of Education in dozens of ways.

He wasn't happy, though, with that. He wasn't happy belittling an educational system that, as even the Premier says, as even the Minister of Finance said at a speech at Harvard University, has resulted in Ontario having one of the best-educated and most skilled workforces in the world. That's what they've had to say when they go abroad, when they go to the United States or they go to Europe.

He wasn't happy with belittling the system and belittling the efforts of people who have worked in this system. No. He goes out and he rigs up a statistically flawed study that claims that Ontario teachers' salaries and Ontario student-teacher ratios have led to vastly higher costs for education here than in other jurisdictions. That was the study he released. Anybody who knows anything about educational finance, anybody who has looked at educational finance and looked at this study, laughed at it because it was so completely absurd. But it was part of the Minister of Education's strategy to promote the crisis, or at least promote the image of a crisis.

He wasn't done there. He hired his own personal lawyer, a lawyer who one day before he was appointed was looking after some of the minister's private property — he appointed his own personal lawyer to go out and do a study of teachers' collective bargaining and to run around the province and rattle the sabre about removing the right to strike from teachers.

Then it goes on from there. In an effort to highlight his own financial focus on education, he then started putting out the trial balloon of taking close to $1 billion out of the teachers' pension fund and finding a way through that to reduce the number of teachers in the system.

Then he accused teachers of refusing to participate in training sessions on his so-called new curriculum. When people in the media investigated the situation, they found there wasn't enough room in the sessions for all the teachers to attend. No matter, though, because this minister really doesn't care about a new curriculum. Anybody who cared about a new curriculum would not only announce the curriculum but would announce the financing and the materials to implement it. We don't have the financing; we don't have the materials. It's all part of this continuing spin.

But it doesn't end there. He then sent ministry officials to talks with teacher federation representatives with a nonnegotiable bottom line. He said, "This is the government's agenda." They want the best system they can get for the least money. That's the government's agenda, that's the government's real agenda — the least money, set that framework, but then, given the least money, what's the best you can do with the least money?

That's where we've gotten to today. This is a government that has taken over $1 billion, if you annualize it, out of the system already and virtually no part of the educational system has been able to avoid those cuts. Junior kindergarten, senior kindergarten, early childhood education in general, education for adults who are returning, special education across the province have been harmed. Classrooms have grown and you can find it in virtually any community. I've been in a couple of classrooms myself where you have in excess of 35 grade 1 students in a classroom. Classroom size is growing — 29, 31, 33, 35. Just this last year the Minister of Education said there would be no further cuts to education. What he didn't

mention was that with the growth in population, with some of the other factors that are in the system, merely by freezing the budgets he's forcing boards to cut $350 million.

1750

Over $1 billion has been taken from the system already. This is the Minister of Education who a year ago, September 17, at the Conservative caucus's retreat at Vineland came out and announced to the media he intended to take a further $1 billion out of the system. That's where we are today. At the meeting that was held earlier today, the Minister of Education met with teachers' reps and basically said to them: "You want to talk about something? Let's talk about how you go home and find a way to extract a further $1 billion."

I have no doubt whatsoever the government's going to retread the line about, "Can we get $600 million out of the teachers' pension fund, and can we make some cuts over here?" I have no doubt that over the next week or so they'll continue to throw up trial balloons about how the $1 billion is going to come out. But the fact of the matter is it will still be $1 billion out of our educational system. It will result in fewer teachers; it will result in fewer resources; it will result in more and more children falling through the cracks. You simply cannot have a first-rate educational system, as we enter the 21st century, if you're not willing to invest the money. This is a government that isn't willing to invest the money, pure and simple.

The fact of the matter is this is a government that is more interested in finding the $5 billion a year — that's what it is — that it takes to fuel their income tax cut. This is a government that is completely focused on finding that $5 billion a year, most of which is going to go to people who are already the wealthiest in this province. They're prepared to take $800 million out of the hospital budgets; they're prepared to take close to $2 billion out of education budgets; they're prepared to download in excess of $1.4 billion on to municipalities, to find that $5 billion to finance their tax giveaway to their wealthy friends. That is the start of their agenda, that is the end of the agenda, that's all there is to their agenda, and that's all there is to their educational agenda: Take money out to fund their tax scheme.

We are headed for this confrontation. Let me say, it was perfectly obvious today that this government wants that confrontation. In all the questions I addressed to the Premier — I gave him six opportunities to stand up and say he would do something to head off a confrontation — the Premier was very clear that everything the Minister of Education and Training has done to promote a confrontation with teachers, the Premier is perfectly okay with it, he's perfectly happy with it.

I want to just spend a minute on why this government wants the confrontation. First of all, they want the confrontation because they do not want the public to focus on the $1 billion coming out. No, they want the battle, they want the confrontation with teachers to use that as a smokescreen. They want the parents to be focused on the confrontation. They want the parents to be focused on the job action. It will then make it easier for this government to withdraw the $1 billion.

All the while, after they withdraw the $1 billion, they will continue to point the finger at teachers: "Teachers are responsible. Teachers don't care about kids." I can hear the propaganda campaign already. This is a propaganda campaign that this government has established after spending literally millions on focus group testing and on public opinion research over the last two years, trying to determine how they will position teachers to attack them.

I can hear the government's propaganda campaign now. It will go like this: The government will say that teachers are greedy. The government will say that teachers are self-interested, that teachers are selfish. The government will say that teachers don't care about the kids. I'm willing to bet that propaganda campaign is sitting in the can right now, already prepared, all ready to go, all ready to be put into action by this government.

This government wants a confrontation with teachers. They want to force teachers out on strike. They want to have a battle with teachers so that will be their smokescreen while they take the $1 billion out.

Teachers don't want to strike. I am a former teacher. I know how dedicated the vast majority of teachers in this province are to the children and to the classroom. Teachers do not want to strike, but this is a government that will give them no other option. This is a government, when they met with the Minister of Education today, where the only message from the Minister of Education was, "Go home and figure out how to get the $1 billion out of the system."

Teachers are going to be forced into this fight. This will not be good for Ontario's educational system, it will not be good for teachers and it won't be good for students. And I'll make a prediction here: It won't be good for your government. You think you can win this. You think you can try your jackboot tactics and walk all over the teachers. Let me tell you, people across this province are on to you. People have seen these tactics before and people know what you're up to and you will not have public support as you go down the road on this one, my friends.

Hon Chris Hodgson (Minister of Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines): Tell us about bringing in the social contract.

Mr Hampton: Just for a few minutes I want to talk about what I believe should be the real educational agenda. One member wants to talk about the social contract. Let me tell you what the social contract did. The social contract enabled us to continue to fund education. It enabled us to continue to fund health care. It enabled us to continue to fund communities. It enabled us to continue to provide for those jobs. The health care services you're shutting down, the hospitals you're closing, for all of those things, the social contract enabled us to continue those kinds of services.

You take 10,000 teachers out of the system and you're going to find how much you've hurt the education system. By maintaining those jobs, by maintaining those services we continue to provide the framework to have a produc-

tive Ontario. What you're doing by attacking health care, by attacking education, by attacking our communities is you're going to cut and slash the economic and social foundations of this province. That's what you're doing.

I want to talk just for a minute about the real agenda that I believe the government ought to be following in terms of education. There is no doubt there is a real problem out there in terms of early childhood education. It has been confirmed by studies in North America, in Europe and elsewhere that if you want to use funding efficiently in the education system, invest in early childhood education.

Study after study has confirmed that every dollar that is spent on early childhood education, on children who are three and a half or four to six years old, saves $7 later on in the system. It saves $7 in special education costs, it saves $7 in terms of children dropping out of school, it saves $7 in terms of unemployment, it saves $7 in terms of young people being involved in the justice system — all of those things.

But is this government prepared to invest in early childhood education? Nowhere in the agenda. Junior kindergarten is an option. Child care spaces are disappearing. Child care workers who are trained and dedicated are being told, "Take less for a salary." We see no positive agenda on the part of this government for early childhood education.

That is where a real difference can be made in terms of the future of our educational system, in terms of the future success of children in that system and in terms of building a better foundation for the kind of society we need, heading into the 21st century, but this government has nothing to say about that other than, "Cut, cut and cut some more."

The second place where there is a crying need to do something positive is to raise the level of achievement of young people who graduate from high school but do not go on to college or university. We absolutely need a good apprenticeship program. We absolutely need a transition that will help those young people get into practical job training and get a job. What has this government done? It's basically annihilated the apprenticeship system. It has cut all kinds of money from community colleges. As I said, it has cut money from adult education. Anything that has to with better equipping people who've graduated from high school to take a productive part in the economy, this government has cut as well. This government has simply cut that in addition to the cuts they have made at the front end.

That is why we brought this resolution today. In our view, there needed to be a sharp debate about what is happening here. This government wants to force teachers on strike. They want to force teachers on strike to provide a smokescreen while they take out the billion dollars. This government has done everything to provoke that confrontation, everything they can to provoke that strike. The Premier is unwilling to involve himself in any way to try to find a solution — no willingness to find that at all.

Again, what is the government's true agenda? The government's true agenda is to find money for their tax scheme, to find a further billion dollars that they can give to their wealthy friends, only this time they're going to take it out of the pockets of little children. They're going to sacrifice the future of children in order to allow their wealthy friends to feed at the trough.

We are opposed and we know the people of Ontario are opposed —

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Wildman has moved opposition day number 2. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members; it will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1801 to 1807.

The Speaker (Hon Chris Stockwell): Mr Wildman has moved NDP motion number 2.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bisson, Gilles	Duncan, Dwight	Martel, Shelley
Boyd, Marion	Grandmaître, Bernard	Martin, Tony
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	McLeod, Lyn
Castrilli, Annamarie	Hampton, Howard	Miclash, Frank
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Morin, Gilles E.
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Pouliot, Gilles
Conway, Sean G.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Cordiano, Joseph	Lankin, Frances	Silipo, Tony
Crozier, Bruce	Laughren, Floyd	Wildman, Bud
Cullen, Alex	Lessard, Wayne	Wood, Len
Curling, Alvin		

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Gilchrist, Steve	Palladini, Al
Baird, John R.	Grimmett, Bill	Parker, John L.
Bassett, Isabel	Harnick, Charles	Pettit, Trevor
Beaubien, Marcel	Harris, Michael D.	Rollins, E.J. Douglas
Boushy, Dave	Hodgson, Chris	Ross, Lillian
Brown, Jim	Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.
Carr, Gary	Jackson, Cameron	Saunderson, William
Carroll, Jack	Johns, Helen	Shea, Derwyn
Chudleigh, Ted	Johnson, Bert	Sheehan, Frank
Clement, Tony	Johnson, David	Skarica, Toni
Cunningham, Dianne	Johnson, Ron	Smith, Bruce
Danford, Harry	Jordan, W. Leo	Spina, Joseph
DeFaria, Carl	Klees, Frank	Sterling, Norman W.
Doyle, Ed	Leach, Al	Tilson, David
Ecker, Janet	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tumbull, David
Eves, Ernie L.	McLean, Allan K.	Vankoughnet, Bill
Fisher, Barbara	Munro, Julia	Villeneuve, Noble
Flaherty, Jim	Murdoch, Bill	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Ford, Douglas B.	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Froese, Tom	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wood, Bob
Galt, Doug		

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 34; the nays are 61.

The Speaker: I declare the motion not carried.

It now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:30.

The House adjourned at 1811.

Evening sitting reported in volume B.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 8 October 1997

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 8 octobre 1997

The House met at 1830.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

UNIFORM FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES ACT, 1997

LOI DE 1997 SUR L'HARMONISATION DES LIGNES DIRECTRICES FÉDÉRALES ET PROVINCIALES SUR LES ALIMENTS POUR LES ENFANTS

Resuming the adjourned debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 128, An Act to amend the Family Law Act to provide for child support guidelines and to promote uniformity between orders for the support of children under the Divorce Act (Canada) and orders for the support of children under the Family Law Act / Projet de loi 128, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le droit de la famille pour prévoir des lignes directrices sur les aliments pour les enfants et pour promouvoir l'harmonisation entre les ordonnances alimentaires au profit des enfants rendues en vertu de la Loi sur le divorce (Canada) et celles rendues en vertu de la Loi sur le droit de la famille.

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): This is a bill that deals with bringing the provincial regulations with regard to family law into line with the federal ones and it is one we all support. We hope it will mean it will serve the needs of families that are undergoing separation or divorce in a way that is better than we've seen before and will avoid the problems that have occurred in the past because the laws were not compatible, provincially and federally.

But all of us in this House have expressed concern during this debate about the fact that we are making this amendment at a time when the government of Ontario has made an utter mess of the family support plan. This has been an ongoing controversy ever since the minister decided in his wisdom that he could centralize the operation and continue to serve the needs of women and their children particularly from one centralized office at Downsview. So the minister laid off about 290 experienced staff and closed eight regional offices.

We all recognize that in the past there have been serious problems with the family support plan in Ontario in previous governments. People were not receiving the support payments to which they were entitled, and in some cases this was going on for a long time and there were long periods of arrears in payments. This caused suffering for families. Children were not getting the kind of support that was required and in many cases single parents were relegated to having to be dependent on social assistance because they were not getting the kind of support they were entitled to.

How the Attorney General believed he was going to be able to improve the plan by laying off experienced staff and closing offices is beyond me. Even when the regional offices were open, they were so busy it was sometimes difficult to get through to them. To close down the offices and to centralize operations at Queen's Park or Downsview would mean it would be even more difficult to get through.

I'd like to relate a case in my own constituency where a constituent of mine had not received support payments since January. She had contacted the 1-800 number repeatedly with no answer. She could never get through. She finally contacted my office after many weeks and months, my staff person, who spends half of her time now on family support problems. I have one staff person who spends half her time doing it. She was able to get through to the new office because, after all the problems they've had, they have now appointed a staff person to deal with each constituency office for MPPs. This person phones our office once a week — I believe it's Thursday mornings — and they spend approximately two hours on the phone dealing with cases.

So she was able to get through to the person who deals with our office. That person didn't know anything about the case and was going to have to check. That was last spring. Eventually the support plan staff indicated to my office that it would be at least a month, I understand, before she could get her payments. So okay, she waited a month. Keep in mind she hasn't had any income since January. She waited a month and nothing happened.

She didn't hear anything and then, ironically, she contacted my constituency office, but that was in midsummer and my constituency office was closed. Both my constituency assistants, the one who deals with the family support plan and other social assistance-type cases and my other staff person who deals with other types of cases, were on holiday. We closed the office for two weeks. We had notified the public that we were going to close the office. We had to close the office so my staff could have some holidays.

She was, I think understandably, upset with our office because she couldn't get through to our office. She needs the money. So she contacted me personally. My assistant here at Queen's Park contacted the office and she got in touch with an individual who was just a new person who

was now dealing with us and a new person dealing with the case. This new person really worked hard on this case, got the information, got back to my staff person here at Queen's Park and informed her that this woman would have to wait a number of weeks more before she could get paid.

When my staff person told me that, I was very angry. Because this government believes the fall begins in August, we had actually come back into session, so I said, "Tell that staff person at that office that if she doesn't get her cheque in a week, this matter is going to be raised in the House with the Attorney General."

My assistant phoned the staff person back and that staff person was quite upset at this. He said: "What's the problem? I mean, it's only going to be a few more weeks." My staff person said, "Well, she hasn't had any money since January." He said, "But that's not fair. I've only been working at this office for three weeks." It wasn't fair that I would raise this matter in the House because the individual who has been working for the family support plan office was only in the job for three weeks and therefore he thought I was being unfair by suggesting I would embarrass him and his minister by raising it in the House.

Keep in mind that the spouse of the individual we're talking about is also very angry because he's been paying. It wasn't that he wasn't paying. His cheques had been going in and she hadn't been getting the money.

What did we find? We found that somebody — we still don't know who — lost the cheque, and miraculously when the staff person was informed that this was going to be raised in the Legislature, the cheque was found and within less than a week she got a cheque and she was very happy.

But then what did we find? She didn't get all the money that had been owed to her since January; she got a first instalment, and we're told that that's because it's unfair — I guess it is — to the spouse, despite the fact that the spouse isn't at fault in this. So I guess it's even more unfair to the spouse that all the money should then be taken immediately and given to his ex-wife.

1840

This individual still hasn't got all the money that's owed to her. It's not because of her spouse. There have been problems with the spouse's employer, I understand, but the main problem is with the family support plan office. The place is in chaos. It's getting better, yes, but it's getting better from a low of service that resulted from the Attorney General's decision to close the regional office, lay off the experienced staff and hand over as much money as possible to the Treasurer to provide a tax cut for wealthy people at the expense of people who are dependent on support cheques.

We're passing this legislation now to bring the laws of Ontario into line with the federal government, and we support that, but we do not support the Attorney General, whose incompetence has been shown over and over here and whose office is in chaos and can't meet the needs of people who deserve their support payments and depend on them. This woman hasn't had her payments since January. She's just got part of it. She deserves to be paid, and the minister's responsible for fixing the problem.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): Questions or comments?

Mr Pat Hoy (Essex-Kent): I indeed want to comment on the horror stories the member for Algoma has spoken about here tonight in regard to the family support plan. We too have experienced great difficulty achieving the rights that people need through this family support program. We too, at my constituency office, were assigned a person we could talk to on a regular basis about caseloads flowing into my office far, far too frequently. That person does their very best with the resources they have and the many members they may have to deal with in the many ridings and the many persons who are suffering under the current family support plan and its lack of ability to provide funds in a timely manner to those persons who require those moneys.

As well, these people have holidays like many others, and a substitute person will be put in place to take over those case loads. But this substitute person quite often doesn't have the background to the case we are talking about, does not have any previous involvement with it, and we go back to square one and start over again. In some cases, we cannot reach the person substituting for the person who may be on sick leave or on holiday, so the people in the riding who deserve the money wait to pay their utilities, to pay for food and to pay for rent. I suggest to the minister that they are woefully understaffed and the people need more help.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I just want to make a few comments about the presentation made by the member for Algoma. He's quite right when he talks about the increased caseload we've seen in our constituency offices. In my office in Cochrane South, Iroquois Falls and Matheson, it came to a question of, on one side, people not being able to receive their family support payments and, on the other end, husbands were paying their family support payments by way of payroll deduction from their employers — garnishee, as it's called — and the money was not flowing through the system.

I can tell you, from the moment the Attorney General closed the regional offices in Sudbury and other communities across this province, where we never had a problem before with cases where people were getting their support payments deducted from their paycheques and passed on to their spouses — the only problems we had were fairly minor and you were able to deal with them — when the government closed the regional offices of the family support plan and moved everything into Downsview and threw it into boxes and into chaos, we started seeing all kinds of problems. It wasn't that you had one, two or three cases at any one time in your constituency office; for a period of about a year, about 40% to 50% of our caseload, depending on the week, was family support plan work, because the government had messed up the whole transition.

Here we are, about a year and a half after the transition, and it has not gone away. The government tries to pretend that they've now fixed the problem and we no

longer have a problem with it, but they're wrong. On average, about 20% of our caseload is still dealing with family support plan.

The member is perfectly right when he points out the problems, and I urge the government to move a heck of a lot faster than they have up to now to fix this problem.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I commend the member for outlining once again the problems that exist with the family support program. Naturally, this bill is one which we hope will be helpful in terms of synchronizing efforts with the federal government, because there is a component there that does affect the federal government. But I think the member has aptly pointed out what happened when the government rushed to close the regional offices without having in place, at the central office it was moving to, the appropriate number of individuals and the appropriate resources to deal with the many problems that exist in the family support plan.

I think there is wide support for the family support plan as such; all three political parties have indicated that over the years. There were some initial problems when the regional offices were established, but at least people felt they could go to those offices. They were sufficiently close that people could visit those offices and try to rectify any problem they may have been encountering.

But to move to the central office, a move, by the way, which was motivated by the fact that the government had to make up for the lost revenue from the tax cut which benefits the wealthiest people in our society the very most — this rush to do things proved to be a mistake for the government. It did not have in place the appropriate resources. It did not have sufficient staff to deal with all the problems and challenges that had been dealt with at the regional offices. The government was certainly wrong in moving forward without at the very least having something else in place to rectify the problem.

Mr Len Wood (Cochrane North): The member for Algoma did a good job of explaining the problem that was created when the Attorney General decided to close down all the offices and move all the material that was in these offices into boxes and put them in transports and move them down to Downsview.

The member for Algoma mentioned that one staff person used half their time dealing with family support problems. The same thing was happening in my office; as a matter of fact, it still is.

This is an example of an incompetent Attorney General who decided to shut down all the offices and lay off all the staff, and as a result, women and children suffered across this province for six or seven months; some of them are still suffering. We know that the spouses in most cases are having the money deducted from their paycheques and it's going into the fund, and for some reason the Attorney General and his staff are not able to get this money flowing out to support the women and children who need it to make sure there's a roof over their heads and food on the table and that they can live a fairly healthy life.

The problem was created by the Attorney General and the Conservative government deciding they were going to move too quickly, and in this particular case they moved in the wrong direction. No government should shut down a support system with over 100 employees and put everything into transports, move it into a building and then not hook up the computers, not hook up the telephone lines. Nothing was done until we sent a couple of people from our caucus over to check out the building and make a video and expose the incompetence of the government. That's exactly what happened.

1850

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Algoma, two minutes.

Mr Wildman: I'd like to thank my colleagues the members for Essex South, Cochranes north and south, and St Catharines north, south, east and west for their comments.

We support the passage of this legislation. I must say I'm surprised that one of my friends from the governing party did not choose to comment on my remarks — I suppose that means they're in complete agreement with them — particularly since one of the arguments raised by the government as a defence for the rule changes is that they wanted more members on their side to be able to speak. Here they had an opportunity to speak and they chose not to. It must mean they agree with me, and I'm glad that's the case, because it is time for us all to admit that this was a serious mistake by the government to close the regional offices, to lay off the experienced staff and to centralize everything in Downsview.

My friend from Cochrane North mentioned that two members of this Legislature visited that office in Downsview, which the minister had said was up and running, and found that most of the files were still in the moving van boxes, that the computer components were strewn around the floor, the place was in chaos, the phones weren't hooked up. No wonder the place wasn't getting the cheques to the people who needed them.

That was because of a decision made by this government to close down regional offices and lay off staff to save money. The purpose of saving the money was to try to give more money to the Minister of Finance to help finance the tax cut. The tax cut, 66% of it, will benefit the top 10% of wage earners in this province on the backs of the women and children who need these support payments. These kids are paying for your tax cut.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Essex South.

Mr Hoy: Essex-Kent, Mr Speaker. But I must say that Essex South is a great riding, as is Essex-Kent.

I'm pleased to speak on Bill 128, the Uniform Federal and Provincial Child Support Guidelines Act. Any legislation that clarifies spousal and child support and provides greater access to that support for women and children is indeed a positive step. I hope this legislation actually provides that. We need a positive step for spouses, many of whom are women, but not exclusively, and their children in regard to family support.

We know in this House that the government closed the regional offices and centralized their operations in

Downsview. They closed an office near my riding, in the city of Windsor. The government went on to create the Family Responsibility Office. But what the government actually created was a problem, a new problem for the spouses and children who are to receive family support.

It's important to note that this support is not government money. I think some people who hear us speaking about this current problem believe these cheques actually flow from the government to spouses and children. But that's not the case. These are court-ordered payments; the courts have deemed the amounts to go to those in these cases. It's very important to note that this money is court-ordered and should flow freely and on time to these people.

Our experience in our constituency offices — I have two — is that there has been a total lack of staffing to deal with the change the government has brought about. We are deluged with calls and continue to receive many calls from constituents who are not receiving their money either in a timely manner or, in most cases, at all. They need these moneys to pay for their utilities, to pay for their rent, to pay for clothing for their children. We're into a new school year. We had many people call us and say, "My children need new clothes to go to school, and we're having a difficult time paying for that."

For me, I suppose the saddest part of their not receiving their moneys is when they may lose the roof over their head, whether it's a rented apartment or home or one they are paying a mortgage on. They're many, many months behind in getting their moneys, and they're having difficulty making mortgage payments. One in particular comes to mind, where the mother was fearful that her whole family was going to be out on the street. She's a working mother. She tries to provide as best she can for her family. She happens to drive a school bus. I know a little about the problems with school buses at this time, people passing school buses when they should not be.

The problem is such that our constituency offices in the last year have seen our long-distance calls escalate to almost double. Our constituency offices are calling the family support plan on a regular basis, hoping someone will answer the call. Many times we are put on hold for 20 minutes or more. Then, when we do reach someone to speak to and they have the time — they're doing the best they can, but when they get off the line from the other person they may be talking to — we may be up to an hour or more discussing cases. Clearly, in my view, they are understaffed. Individuals trying to call the family support plan have an even more difficult time. I've had people say they have called hourly throughout the day and cannot get through.

We don't mind helping these individuals. That's our role. As MPPs, our role is to help people. That's the way I see my role in total: to be here to form legislation that will help people. We don't mind helping; we don't mind at all. But if the system worked, we wouldn't have nearly the amount of work we have in regard to family support. There would be no need for our help in most cases if the system worked. But the minister has botched the transition from the regional offices to what is now located here in Downsview.

The minister knew of this problem — we've heard it on a daily and weekly basis in this House — and he said he would help. He said cheques would be processed within 24 to 36 hours. So here in the House I crossed the floor to the minister and gave him 40 cases to look at. We didn't hear anything for two weeks, after he said cheques would flow in 24 to 36 hours. Then that two weeks extended to a month, and nothing happened. People were waiting for their funds, court-ordered funds, to provide for their children, indeed to provide for themselves.

We couldn't read some of the family support responses we did get. They were in what I call chicken scratch. There were notes in the corners, notes on the bottom, acronyms no one knew. When we called back, no one at the office knew what they were either. So here's another time lag: information sent to us on these cases and no one could read them; they were indecipherable. That's a total waste of time for all and again a delay for the people who required the money.

1900

So what do these people do? They come to the constituency offices and ask for our help. One travelled here to a legislative committee, and in that committee the parliamentary assistant, after hearing of her plight, and staff within the ministry, said, "We will help you; we're going to rectify your problem," where her children potentially would be thrown out of their home because of a lack of court-ordered funds.

She was very pleased. She thought the government had finally heard her plea and it would indeed do something about it. After all, it was the parliamentary assistant who said so. Absolutely nothing happened. So no one is happy. Employers have made the proper deductions and the money does not flow to those who should receive it.

The Attorney General knew in advance that this change from the regional offices to Downsview was going to cause problems, it was going to cause delay. He was advised that the new system was going to create havoc and he went ahead and did it anyway. He went ahead and put the livelihood of many people in jeopardy. Why not wait? What was the rush? Do it right. But, no, they rushed ahead, and many people suffered because of it. They suffered because the minister was in a hurry, even after being advised that he should not move so quickly.

There now are self-help groups springing up in Ontario to counsel and advise people who are not receiving their moneys. One that I'm aware of is called TNT Now: Takes No Time Now. They're helping individuals who think they are the only one with this problem and they're telling them there are many, many suffering.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): I'm pleased to respond to the member for Essex-Kent. He hits the nail right on the head, because you can't discuss Bill 128 without discussing the incompetence of the Attorney General, the Attorney General's complete inability to deal with the family support plan and get the money that's

owed to moms and their kids to them, money that's theirs, money that has disappeared into the Attorney General's black hole, in collaboration of course with his private sector friends, his corporate buddies, the Royal Bank. So it's entirely appropriate, it's impossible not to speak about the Attorney General and the family support plan and the crisis that he created when one is addressing Bill 128.

I quite frankly look forward to Bill 61 later tonight because Bill 61 is also a bill sponsored by the Attorney General and I'm interested in speaking to Bill 61 because I'm interested in exploring even further the incompetence of the Attorney General and his mismanagement of the FSP. I'm interested in talking about the mere 100 — just 100 — drivers' licences that he's prepared to suspend pursuant to his tough new enforcement rules. Bill 61 is going to enable me to do that.

I'm interested in talking about the fact that Mike Harris's government raised the minimum wage here at Queen's Park, at least for MPPs, with a salary increase in Bill 42 by approximately 10%. I'm interested, when we get to Bill 61, to speak to the salary increase, and I'll tell you why that's relevant: because the incompetence of the Attorney General is even less acceptable when you know that he enjoyed a salary increase at the same time that the government slashed social assistance benefits for moms and their kids, the unemployed, the poorest in our province, by 22%. At the same time that Harris and this government slashed social assistance benefits by 22%, they raised their own salaries by a minimum of 10%. The recent figures gathered by James Wallace of the Toronto Sun prove that beyond any doubt, beyond any question.

Yes, during the course of Bill 142 I raised that, and the parliamentary assistant tried to say, no, I was wrong. I'll prove it later during the course of Bill 61.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Durham Centre): I listened with interest to the remarks of the member for Essex-Kent, followed by the member for Welland-Thorold commenting on those. In the 12 minutes that we just spent, there was little said about Bill 128, which is the bill before the House. That is the bill to provide for child support guidelines and to provide uniformity between the federal Divorce Act and the provincial family law legislation.

It is important legislation if the concern of the members is for mothers and children in the province of Ontario. The federal Divorce Act guidelines apply to divorce proceedings. Many persons in the province have common-law relationships; many are separated and are not governed by the federal legislation. For those reasons, I encourage all the members opposite — and many of them have spoken in this debate; this is the fourth day of debate on second reading of a bill that all of the members opposite who have spoken say they support. If they do support it, and I believe they do, I urge them to join us in moving it forward to third reading as quickly as possible because these guidelines are very important for mothers and children in Ontario, with respect to whom you express great concern. I'd like you to match your concern that you express in words with action and move this bill forward as quickly as we can to third reading.

Kids come first for our government, and these guidelines will increase the consistency of awards and will give parents and their children, in cases of marriage dissolution and marriage break-up, greater predictability in what they're likely to obtain in terms of support orders. Predictability is important for all those who are involved in those unfortunate situations. It's a way of getting resolution of these conflicts earlier on, hopefully without the use of the courts as much, and it'll be faster, cheaper and more expeditious for all involved, especially for the kids in Ontario.

Mr Bradley: I want to commend the member for Essex-Kent for his insightful observations about the family support plan and its implications for people in the province who require the assistance that is provided through this plan, namely the children and the spouses in this province.

The bill itself is one which will pass this Legislature. The member for Durham Centre, I think it is — he'll correct me if it's not — is worried that we are spending four days on this particular bill. I remind him, before the rule changes it would have been likely that we would have come to an easy accommodation whereby this bill might have passed in half the time that is being devoted to it now. But the government picks and chooses how long it will spend on a bill. For instance, with the education bill, Bill 160, a matter of some considerable controversy in the province, the government brought in a time allocation motion, a motion which chokes off debate on a very important issue.

So the only way the opposition can give you more time to reflect upon your entire legislative agenda is to take extra time with bills that may not have the same import as some of the major bills or may not be as controversial as some of the major bills, but nevertheless, by taking some additional time, it allows the Premier and others in the government to reflect upon the mistake they might have made in other pieces of legislation.

I'm pleased the member has pointed out the problems, has indicated clearly that family support plan problems continue to dominate the calls to his constituency office. We hope through this debate that we can encourage the government to provide a more expeditious and thorough service to the people of this province.

Mr Bisson: Just to put it into a bit of a personal context from the perspective of a constituent of mine, Sylvie Pressé, who lives in the city of Timmins, I can tell you that through the changeover from the closure of the eight regional offices of the family support plan to where we are now, Sylvie has seen month after month after month a stymied effort on her part to be able to get her support payment flowing directly to her.

What's happened is that her husband works for one of the rail companies just west of Timmins. Every two weeks the rail company deducts the money from his paycheque and every month the rail company sends off the cheque, as it is supposed to, directly to the family support plan, actually to the Bank of Montreal, so that money can be distributed. But every time it's the same thing. Every

month Sylvie has to come back to our office for us to try yet again to get hold of the family support plan or, as they call it now, the Family Responsibility Office, in order to fix the same problem every month.

You would think that the government and this particular office, the Family Responsibility Office, would get it right once, maybe the second time, maybe the third time, maybe the fourth time, but no, it's the same story month after month. I can tell you, if Sylvie had the means to be here today, she would be here talking to the minister and telling him directly what she and her children have had to go through as a result of his messing up the family support plan system, because prior to this government changing the system she never had the kind of problems she's finding today.

1910

On behalf of Sylvie Pressé, I'm saying to you as the government and I'm saying to the Attorney General, Mr Harnick — whom Sylvie does not have a lot of respect for, I must add — that you need to get this straight. If you're going to go through changes — I have a problem with the direction in which you're going — you owe it to Ontarians to at least do the transition right and to make the system work for the people in the end, something it's certainly not doing in Sylvie's case.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Essex-Kent, you have two minutes.

Mr Hoy: I'd like to thank the members for Welland-Thorold, Durham Centre, St Catharines and Cochrane South for their comments. I think the member for Cochrane South really hit it on the head here, that if you are going to make a change, it has to be done correctly, it has to be done with thorough thought and it has to be done with the supreme idea that you have to service the public in this regard of family support.

The people who call or visit our offices are from time to time in tears because these moneys, court-ordered as they are, did flow at one time and now they're not there. By and large, most of the constituents who call my office are women, but not exclusively so, and in more cases than not, they have families and they need to provide for them.

I think the government just simply moved too quickly and did not take into account the lives that were behind the decision they made, even when advice was given that the haste with which the government was moving to centralize this plan here in Downsview would cause havoc, grief and despair and cause people a great deal of worry.

You can't treat government decisions like an ordinary business. I've talked to many people who say they've spoken with government members who say, "We had a meeting at 10 o'clock when I was in business and by noon the problem was solved." This is a big problem. Issues here are complex. There is no need to move in haste and put people's lives and livelihoods, their children and families at risk.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I appreciate the opportunity this evening, in the very few minutes I have, to put some thoughts on the record on this piece of legislation, but most particularly on the overall context within which this piece of legislation is to play out in this province today in October 1997.

I'll start off by reading into the record a quote I've read into the record probably two or three times so far in the short two years and some months that we've been governed in Ontario by this government, because it's still appropriate. I think there are some things that are said in this place that need to be said over and over again because even though the people out there, in my experience of it to date —

Mr Frank Klees (York-Mackenzie): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe that according to the standing orders it's inappropriate to read an item into the record that is already there.

The Deputy Speaker: I haven't detected anything wrong so far. The member for Sault Ste Marie.

Mr Martin: It's interesting, Speaker, that a member of this government, which has already curtailed the ability of the opposition in this place to speak to very important pieces of legislation, very important initiatives by this government that have tremendously devastating and negative impacts on the constituents we represent, would stand tonight when I have now eight and a half minutes left in a speech I want to make on this piece of legislation and make such a point of order that really has no basis in anything that I've ever come across or seen in this place.

But that's the way they operate. If that's the way this group of dictators wants to run this place, there's not a whole lot we can do about it. They have a majority and they just change the rules whenever they feel like it, cut back on our ability to participate and to speak on behalf of our constituents.

I just want to share this quote with the members because I think it's important: "We are aboard a train which is gathering speed, racing down a track...leading to unknown destinations. Nobody is in the engine cab and there may be demons at the switch."

Mr Bradley: Who said that?

Mr Martin: Ralph Lapp did.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): Printed in the Catholic New Times.

Mr Martin: "Most of the society is in the caboose looking backwards."

However, things have changed somewhat since I first shared this with the House. I believe, from talking to people out there in my constituency and across the province, that they are more and more coming to realize that this train is hurtling down the track. They're coming to realize where it's going and that they can collectively do something about the direction, slow it down, bring it to a stop and make some changes.

It's interesting. We're going to support this piece of legislation in this House because it makes sense. For once, we have something in front of us being presented by the government that we can support and so we will support it. But people have to understand that one piece of legislation in isolation does not change the whole fabric that's being woven by this government, does not in any significant way

alleviate some of the pressure, some of the difficulty that's been imposed on people across this province.

I think it's important to remind the government what it is they should be about and where it is that we should be going and what it is that makes a piece of legislation like this actually work. We heard colleagues this evening and on other dates talk about the state of the family support plan in the province and how it needs to be looked at and improved in a significant way if this is going to work. But I want to put this in a fuller context and ask the government members to try to do the same and share it with the folks out there so that they can, with me, begin to see how this is not in keeping with some of the best traditions that this province is built on.

Here's a statement I picked up that was put out by the United Church of Canada, a very respected and reputable organization that has spoken out even more recently on some of the changes this government is going to impose on the education system, on teachers and on the support staff to the education system in this province and challenges the government in a very pointed way about the injustices that are inherent in that piece of work. Let me just share this with you because this piece of legislation has to be seen in the context of statements such as this. It says here:

"The very first priority of any government must be to stop the slashing of the safety net that we as a society wove under the feet of our neighbours, the means by which we joined God in making justice and love concrete among us."

My colleague from Welland-Thorold a few minutes ago very passionately spoke about the damage that has been done over the last two and a half years to the very poorest and most vulnerable among us. I've said in this House before and I'll say again tonight, the most shocking day in my experience re this government was that day in July 1995 when I woke up to the news on the radio that this government's very first act, the first thing it did when it became government, was to pick out the most vulnerable and the poorest living in our communities and take 22% away from them by way of their income.

Some, and I know I was one of those, likened it to the school yard bully walking into the yard, looking around, assessing the situation, picking out the smallest and the weakest and walking over without any warning and laying a beating on them, leaving them there bloodied and sobbing and, in doing that, setting the tone for the rest of the school yard and the rest of the school.

The United Church goes on re this business of joining God and making justice and love concrete among us by saying that what we're missing today in government is a sense of the moral and a spirit of community, a lack of leadership.

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If we're not working collectively in the interests of all the people who call the jurisdiction which we govern home, what are we working for? The question that many of us are asking these days is, what is it that drives the government we have in Ontario today and who is it they serve? We have been given some very clear indications of who that is. We only have to look at the tax break and who that benefits. We only have to look, as I said a few minutes ago, at the way the poor are being dealt with. We only have to look at Bill 142 to recognize how that group and the handicapped among us are going to be dealt with in the future that will unfold if this government is allowed to continue on its present track and implement some of the legislation and plans that, yes, they laid out in the Common Sense Revolution, but more important, have elaborated more fully in the agenda they have put before us here.

All of us in this place and across the province, anybody who has been given the responsibility of leadership, should be working towards the common good, defining what that is and then doing all in our power to make sure we're building it up. I don't think it would be out of line to say that previous governments of every stripe — Conservative, Liberal and New Democrat — were moving in that direction, were adding to and allowing the system to evolve so that all who called Ontario home were able to find the wherewithal to have a good living, educate their kids and, if they were sick, get fixed up.

I reference the issue of the common good, that which we should all be working for. Some of you may ask, what is this common good? Let me just share with you a definition of that to end my comments this evening on this bill, which, as I said before, we will support because it does move a distance to correcting some shortcomings. The common good is defined here as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily." I call on the government to do that.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the remarks of the member for Sault Ste Marie about the public good. There were no remarks I heard with respect to Bill 128, the bill before the House, for the fourth day for second reading, a bill the opposition members say they support. Given the concern of the member for Sault Ste Marie about the common good, I'm sure he will realize that it is in the best interests of the children in Ontario who are the victims of marital breakup to have this legislation move forward as quickly as it possibly can through the legislative process so those support payments will be forthcoming on a timely basis.

We have had many calls and many expressions of interest and questions with respect to what the guidelines contain, the consistency between the federal guidelines and the provincial guidelines contained here. If parents have concerns with respect to the content of the guidelines and want further information, there is a toll-free. It's 1-800-980-4962, available to everyone in the province who needs information with respect to this important issue.

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): It doesn't work.

Mr Flaherty: That 1-800 number that the member for Lake Nipigon says doesn't work has been called and answered more than 9,000 times.

We also have child support plan information kits available for concerned parents in the province. They have

been requested many times; in fact, more than 58,000 copies of the information kits have been sent out, I say to the member from Lake Nipigon. That shows the degree of importance of this legislation, that we move these guidelines through the House as quickly as possible, because kids come first for our government.

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): It's a pleasure for me to rise to speak a little on what the member for Sault Ste Marie has indicated. As a fellow northerner, I suggest that I run into a great many problems similar to those he runs into in terms of people having access to offices. Any legislation that will help in terms of giving this government's downsizing plans some semblance of order would certainly be of benefit to many of my constituents. I have indicated in the House many times the number of cases that come through my door at present because we lost our local office in Thunder Bay. People aren't interested in 1-800 numbers; they're looking for service when they run into problems, especially support payments, the failure to transfer support payments and the problems we have brought forth to this Legislature numerous times, not only with the parent who is not providing the support, but sometimes the company becomes involved. I brought a case to the House at one point where there was a problem with the company.

Anything that is going to provide greater access to support for women and particularly children — the previous member said the government is interested in children. It is often hard to believe when you face case after case where children are being denied because the custodial parent is unable to gain access to what would be paying for the children's needs.

Again, it gives me pleasure to rise and say that I support a lot of the things the member for Sault Ste Marie has said.

Mr Christopherson: I'm very pleased to rise and commend my colleague from Sault Ste Marie for his very passionate and very caring comments on this. He is known in our caucus, I think known by everyone who has any dealings with him at all, as someone who cares deeply. He is a very religious man who lives a life that's an example to his religion, and he is an individual we look up to. When he speaks on these issues, I don't think there is anyone in this House who can bring greater compassion or caring than he does.

I found it quite disturbing, as did Tony Martin, when the member for York-Mackenzie got up and tried to block a quote being read from a magazine or a newspaper called the Catholic New Times. I don't know whether the honourable member across the way from York-Mackenzie is a member of the much-known family values caucus, but I suggest that if there truly was a group of people within the Tory caucus who actually believe in a meaningful way in what they purport to mean, they would want something from the Catholic New Times read into the record. If it's more than once, I'd have thought they'd have been proud of that; that whether it's twice or three times or 10 times, there are values in here they would care about.

Instead, the member got up and used my colleague's time to try to block him from reading a quote that had at its core a religious value. I find that quite hypocritical on the part of any member of this Tory caucus. I think every one of you would be well served in terms of representing your constituents to pay attention to the kind of moral leadership that a Tony Martin can provide.

Mr Jack Carroll (Chatham-Kent): As the member for Hamilton Centre said, the member for Sault Ste Marie may care deeply — I don't doubt that — and he may be very religious — I also don't doubt that — but he also doesn't know very much about Bill 128, because he didn't make any reference to it.

He did refer to Bill 142, a bill I happen to be fairly familiar with, and I don't think he knows very much about Bill 142 either, because he commented that he was critical of how we will be treating people with disabilities when we pass Bill 142. I want to remind him about a few things in Bill 142 that will be to the benefit of people with disabilities. He may want to check the record and maybe read the bill on these.

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First of all, we will be giving to people with disabilities larger asset exemptions so that they can help themselves more. We will also be allowing their families to leave them more money, to help them out more on a monthly basis so that they can live a better life. We will also be giving them the opportunity, if they are on disability, to try working, and if working isn't the proper thing for them, they can have their benefits reinstated rather than get to the end of the queue, as they had to do before. We will also have a new training program that will do more than just assess them and assess them and assess them; it will actually train them and help people with disabilities to get some skills so they can go back to work.

For the edification of the member from Sault Ste Marie, with Bill 128 we are putting children first. With Bill 142 we are putting people with disabilities first. I would recommend to him that maybe he needs to look a little more closely at those bills so he understands what they have to say. But I am pleased to see that he is going to support Bill 128.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sault Ste Marie, you have two minutes.

Mr Martin: I want to thank all those who participated tonight in this debate. I think it's important that we do that. That's what this House is about. It's just unfortunate that we don't get enough time to do it.

Very briefly, member for Chatham-Kent, you're obviously talking only to the spin doctors in your party. Anybody who knows of the situation that presents itself to the handicapped and the disabled in the province knows that this bill is so bereft of detail, of any indication of exactly what it is you're going to do, that they're really frightened that they don't know, and if their experience with your government so far is any indication, they are frightened of what it is you might do.

I think you should go back home and talk to some of your constituents about some of this stuff and find out

exactly what it is they think and feel and how it is actually going to impact on them.

That's the point I was trying to make about this bill we have in front of us here tonight. It's a good bill. I know what it is; we all know what it is. We caucused it. We talked about it. But it's the context within which it fits. It's like trying to put a patch on an old garment. It's the "new wine into old wineskins" theory all over again. You've got to get rid of the context, the very difficult environment you're creating out there for people, before you put a piece of legislation like this into place and expect that it's going to work.

I spoke a bit about the family support plan, the situation that the very poorest in our communities find themselves in today. To put this in the context of that is to try and put a sole on a shoe that has just outworn its purpose.

Just to give you an indication in the 10 seconds I have left of exactly what's happening out there, here's an article from the Toronto Sun that says, "TB Plagues Homeless." That's what's happening in Toronto today. That's what's happening in Ontario today. That's where you want to put this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Prescott and Russell): C'est avec plaisir que je prends la parole pour parler sur le projet de loi 128. I am pleased to rise and speak on Bill 128, the uniform child support guideline act. One of the reasons I am pleased to speak on this bill is that I want to tell this government what they have created when they introduced this bill.

It seems to me that every one of us will definitely support this bill. But with the problems they created when they closed the eight regional offices, we were receiving an average of three to four calls a day in our constituency offices. The member for Durham Centre said, "Why should we debate the bill, since everyone seems to agree on it?" Well, every time this government introduces a bill, it seems they haven't looked at the impact it will have, haven't done a complete study of what is going to happen: "Do we have our people properly trained to handle the new technology?"

I was able to visit the Downsview office once. I got my constituent assistant to come to Toronto to meet the people at the Downsview office. At that time, we noticed they were disorganized. When I say that, I mean there was never any follow-up on the calls they were receiving from our riding office. I asked the question, "Why don't you have the same people to handle the file?" They said, "We have to train all the people." It wasn't the time to train the people after we closed the eight regional offices and centralized it in Toronto.

There are some families who lost their home, had their hydro cut off. Also, many times we had to take in the court order, to tell them there was a court order. We knew the person had paid directly the Royal Bank, I think it was, and I think that's where the money is still going. The government had over $1 billion in the bank not distributed. All that time, though, the spouses, the families — we've seen children quitting school. The mother had no money. We've seen children leaving the home because there was no money to feed the children, and the mothers kept calling us. We did everything we could. We were getting four to five calls a day in my three constituency offices.

Today there's a big improvement. I fully agree there's a big improvement. But Cumberland, I don't know why — probably they think Cumberland is not in my riding. It is in my riding. It seems they are still facing the same problem in that area. We received in our county office cheques from the ministry that had no names on them. We finally had to drive in, in front of the House here, and say, "We have received cheques at our social services office with no name on them." It was so disorganized that it's unbelievable.

Today we all agree that we will support this bill, but I still say we are not ready. At one time, I met the Attorney General and said, "Would you reconsider your position on reopening the regional office until the whole setup is completed in the Downsview office?" I noticed that he probably was ready to look at it, but someone told him not to do it. That would have solved a lot of problems. For those people who have lost their home, who had their hydro cut off, that probably wouldn't have happened. It's still the same; in some areas, we are not able to get the cheques sent to the spouses.

Many cases arise because of not having the people trained properly. We in the MPP offices were acting as liaison officers for the Attorney General's office. At one point, even the lawyers' offices were saying: "Call your MPP. There's nothing we can do." They were getting good money to look after the cases, but they noticed they were facing a dead wall. They could not get any answer.

At one time when I was there, she showed me on the computer: "Waiting time on the phone, seven minutes." The following morning, we got back to our riding office and we called: over an hour waiting time. How can you expect a working mother, having to work in a private enterprise, to wait on the line when there's only one line coming in to that business or enterprise or commercial office? It wasn't possible to do, so the people just got fed up and got on the phone to us. We had to hire a second person at our riding office to follow up on those cases. But now, finally, the Attorney General's office has appointed a person to look after our cases in Prescott and Russell. We are getting better service, but not the level of service we were getting when the Ottawa regional office was open.

We will definitely support this bill, but I must tell you that many times this government is moving ahead with new bills — we could give you examples. When they introduced Bill 104, for example, it didn't allow the cottage owner, any home owner who didn't live in that specific municipality, to vote for school board trustees. They came back yesterday. They realized they made a mistake. They came back with Bill 158.

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Once again, on long-term care they said, "We will transfer this 50% to the municipalities," until they realized

it was impossible for a municipality to absorb the cost of the operation of the long-term care or of nursing homes.

Another case where the government had to come back was school taxes. At the beginning they said, "We will take over all the school taxes." They came back and said, "Municipalities, you will have to collect 50% of the school tax." But we still don't know what they are going to be, because the government will establish the mill rate for school taxes.

It's the same thing for commercial buildings. It's the same thing for farming communities. It's the same thing for apartment buildings. It's the same thing for senior citizens' homes. What is this government doing? It's moving too fast on everything. They have an agenda. We know you have an agenda. But don't move too fast. Realize what the impact is going to be before you make any move.

The member for Chatham-Kent did recognize, about five minutes ago, that we need proper training. He said, "When we complete our training, everything will be fine." But we've been at it for over a year. It was September 1996 when we decided to close all the regional offices. A year after, a member of the government is saying: "We will have the training. Training is very important." So he did recognize that. I hope every one of you people on the other side recognizes that any new technology requires training. You probably don't have the staff. If we were to look at the reduction of people when you closed all the regional offices, I would say probably now, even with the new technology and not getting the same service we were getting in the past, you have more people in your Downsview office than you had in all of the eight regional offices before.

So once again, don't move too fast, government people, because you don't realize the trouble you have created at the present time — the damage, the children who have left home because their mothers couldn't feed them, they had to go someplace else. They had to go to the children's aid society because their mothers couldn't afford them. We have a lot of cases we could give you as examples. It's easy. We have all the names at our office. At one time, I sent a list of the people waiting for the last week, only for a week; 45 people appeared on the list I gave to the Attorney General. That's 45 people in one week who called our office. That's quite a few people. All those people were waiting.

Another time, money was deducted from a woman who had left Ontario to go to Vancouver. She came back and she said, "I have taken over the children" —

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Your time has expired. The member for Welland-Thorold.

Mr Kormos: I'm pleased to respond to the member for Prescott and Russell. He speaks from the heart. He speaks with experience. He speaks with an understanding of what has been happening to his constituents during the course of the last two or two and a half years while this Harris regime has been in power here in Ontario.

I find it remarkable that these Tory members would stand up and spout the backroom line, the spin, the scripted speeches, when they know better. I question why they would do that. Why would they risk their integrity by reciting the spin, the lines that have been concocted by $1,000-a-day spin doctors? I figure it must be because of what, as a result of Bill 42, ended up being not just the 10% I had spoken of in Bill 42 — the member, Mr Carroll, might pay some attention — but what has amounted to a 40% increase in disbursements for salaries of MPPs here at Queen's Park. That's the kind of raise these guys gave themselves at the same time they were in the course of dismantling the family support plan.

Here are the numbers. Before Bill 42, it cost $7.5 million to compensate rank-and-file members of provincial Parliament; after Bill 42 it cost $10.5 million — $3 million more. That's a 40% increase in wages and salaries, contemporaneous with the 21.6% slashing of the modest allowances provided to single moms and their kids. They robbed, they took money from children to pay themselves what their own government's data show has been a 40% increase. Those are the numbers, my friend: $7.5 million a year before Bill 42; $10.5 million — $3 million more — now.

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the remarks of the member for Prescott and Russell and also the further remarks of the member for Welland-Thorold.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Stop the clock, please. Give him a chance to answer.

Mr Flaherty: Thanks, Speaker. I have no doubt that the member for Prescott and Russell speaks from the heart and that he speaks from experience. I also have no doubt that he doesn't speak about this bill that's before the House, which is Bill 128, dealing with support guidelines for spouses and children in Ontario, who indeed are in need. Once again, I urge the members opposite, who say they care deeply about this issue, to move forward with this legislation.

This bill was introduced in this Legislature on May 1, 1997. Many other provinces in Canada have already dealt with making the provincial guidelines in those provinces match the federal guidelines under the Divorce Act. So I urge members to deal with this as quickly as we can, particularly since this is the fourth time we've dealt with this on second reading.

For those who need information with respect to the implementation plan — and implementation is very important, of course, when we're dealing with the support of children in the province — we are prepared, the government is prepared. There's a number, 1-800-980-4962, which is toll-free, which has been used, as I've said, more than 9,000 times. The information kits are available through that line, 1-800-980-4962. In addition, the court officials in Ontario have been fully briefed on this matter and fully informed so that people who have concerns in their local communities can go to their local court offices and get the information they need with respect to child support in the province, which is of course a very serious family matter which requires attention and predictability and consistency for the sake of all of the children in the province.

Mr Hoy: I want to congratulate the member for Prescott and Russell on his remarks to Bill 128. He spoke about consistency, as do many of us here tonight in this debate. I said in my opening remarks that if Bill 128 clarifies spousal and child support, provides greater access to that support for women and children, it is a positive step. We agree to that. But we're looking to the government for consistency.

The member for Prescott and Russell stated that he felt the people at Downsview were doing their very best but they weren't trained for the change. If the government were really interested in providing money to children, to the parents of those children, they would have taken the time to make this transition a proper and organized transition.

The member for Prescott and Russell spoke about his visit and saw the disorganization that was taking place within that office. We know from our telephone calls that this is also true. I can't believe the government members are not being deluged with these calls as well. I'd be interested to know, in regard to what we learned this morning about when the government got their downloading numbers and when opposition members got theirs far, far later, if indeed the government members might have a different phone number for reaching Downsview than we do. I don't know that, but perhaps they don't have the problems that we do over here because they're accessing a different number.

For those people in the communities who are calling a 1-800 number and are waiting hour after hour to get through, the government should put all resources into correcting the problems.

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Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I'd like to thank the member for Prescott and Russell for his remarks with respect to Bill 128. It's obvious that he spoke from experience and he spoke from the heart as well. He spoke about the calls that he has been getting from lawyers' offices, lawyers who are getting totally frustrated with trying to make contact with the family support plan to resolve the issues affecting their clients, and he talked about his experience of seeing on a computer screen that response time was supposed to be seven minutes when in fact it was an hour.

I am not really surprised that what shows up on the computer screen is quite different from what shows up in reality, especially given some of the things that I have seen from this government in the short time I have been here.

He talked about how disorganized he found the family support office, and that really is just a statement about the gross incompetence of the Attorney General's office and the family support plan office as well. He talked as well about the government and how they have introduced this bill and other bills and said that every time they introduce a bill, they just don't seem to have any consideration of the impact the bill is going to have. This is a government that has itself demonstrated time and time again as one that shoots first and thinks about the impact later. This is one of those cases where they have moved too far too fast, and they obviously weren't considering what the impact was going to be. They weren't prepared for it. They didn't have the people trained and in place to do the job they were supposed to do.

In last week's Law Times, there was an article from a lawyer who says that those problems are just as bad today as they were a year ago. It hasn't gotten any better. The regional offices are closed and the service hasn't improved, notwithstanding this 1-800 number that we have heard about.

Le Vice-Président : Monsieur le député de Prescott et Russell, vous avez deux minutes.

Mr Lalonde: I noticed that the member for Durham Centre said again that he has a 1-800 number. I invite every one of you people here tonight to try this phone number tomorrow, and you can come back and tell me how long it takes to get a line, even though they are probably well organized. I want to specify again that when I was there, the people in that office worked with what they had. It's not their fault if they were not meeting the requirements of the calls they were getting; it's because they didn't have the staff. They were disorganized. They even went as far as saying, "We are waiting for a $60-million computer system"; I think it was $60 million at that time, if I remember right. The computer hadn't arrived and they had moved everything to that central office in Downsview, so once again, this is why they were so disorganized.

At one time, the government had to hire a private firm which was handling all the calls from a local hotel here in Toronto. I would like to know what the bill was for that firm and how much it cost this government just in long-distance calls — I know which hotel you were operating it from — because your staff could not handle all the calls. Once again, it means when you start a new project, make sure that you have your people properly trained. This way we will not be in the dark like we were when we took over this central office in Toronto.

I just want to say that they introduced this bill on May 1, 1997. That was a little over five months after had they centralized everything in Toronto. If they had waited until May 1 to open up the central office, it would have been all right.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Pouliot: We too will be supporting Bill 128, the family law act, at second reading, simply because it comes very close to matching the federal statute. Both the federal government and the province of Ontario, under Bill 128, deal with family child support. The highlights of the bill pretty well remain the same, but it will be easier for both jurisdictions to streamline and to administer.

However, no matter how simple, whatever the attempts are at streamlining, at cutting through red tape, at making things more uniform, it has little merit or value if you don't at the same time streamline and make the process respond to the needs of the applicants. In this case, we're talking about some among the most vulnerable and marginalized people in our society: spouses, mostly women,

and the dependent children. The government in this case has screwed up big time, because the government chose in their lack of wisdom in this instance to show to the door 285 people who worked at the regional offices across Ontario. They gave them the pink slip, terminated their employment. They were the go-betweens. They were the providers of the service as the money flowed from one spouse to the other.

The government said: "We are going to move. We will close eight regional offices and we will move to downtown Toronto, for Toronto knows best." They made an attempt to centralize in Downsview. The movers came by the dozen, loaded those trucks with boxes, and the real people found themselves being a piece of paper.

Jack had diligently sent the court-ordered money to Jane, as he was told to do, for four or five years, because they had become less compatible and under the statute they both had responsibility to support the children. With the new arrangement imposed by the government from their central office, the money stopped flowing. Jane, after six years of continuous payment, was no longer getting the payments. Simply put, it's because they acted in haste. They pride themselves on being good business people. If the same mess had occurred in the marketplace, under the auspices of business, you would have had to close the door. You would go bankrupt. Much more important in this case, because of the ultimate in human dimension, you are dealing with people. What a disincentive to keep your support payments flowing. In some cases, people were under the impression: "Why keep paying? The children are not getting the money anyway."

The government was under a state of siege, but this is not a government that admits mistakes when it makes them. That would be too appropriate. It wouldn't be fitting with the kind of agenda diabolique. They would cease to be arrogant. So they continue their state of denial in saying: "There's nothing wrong. The system is working and it's working fine." Real cases from many members of the opposition — and I'm sure government members got a multitude of phone calls, more than ever before, because the money had stopped flowing.

The government said, "We have established a phone system, " but if you're an MPP, you have a special phone, you can get through. You can piecemeal one by one, but if you're Ms Jones, you don't have access. Again, you're not rich, you're not powerful, and when you pick up the phone and you dial that 1-800 number, you will get, "If you have a touch-tone phone, please dial 4." So you begin to punch the number 4. Then it will be, "Please wait," and then the lament, the litany, the jargon keeps you going for seven or eight minutes. They wanted to know everything through the system, and if you missed one punch, you had to start all over again. In the meantime, the children are waiting for mom to get the cheque.

The bank got to them and said, "This is going to be a saving."

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"We promised in the Common Sense Revolution that we would eliminate 15,000 civil service jobs." Well, 289 were let go, were shown the door, but with those 289, tens of thousands of people in need stopped getting the money. That's what you did. You should think of your responsibilities and admit it, because everybody knows the system is flawed. It took the courage, through investigative politics of two my distinguished colleagues —

Mr Bradley: Name names.

Mr Pouliot: Shelley Martel, Sudbury East, and Peter Kormos, Welland-Thorold, took their courage in the early hours of the morning, at great risk, because with the commissars, when you take your responsibilities seriously, you're often viewed as the Bonnie and Clyde of the NDP. Let me assure you, not so.

What were they about to uncover and discover once they reached Downsview? It was a mess of extraordinary proportions: boxes all over the corridors — those were real people in the boxes, through their files — no security; computers that were unplugged and useless, while the people at home waited for their cheques, while the people at home still believed that a two-month delay would one day be fixed retroactively. It wasn't to be so, and to this day MPPs know, for they keep getting the calls to represent the citizens in need.

If this had been a computer glitch at the Toronto Stock Exchange it would have been fixed overnight, for trading must not be delayed. That exchange must be open, but the exchange between two people vis-à-vis the responsibility to their children can be put on the back burner: "We will process that order when we have time. The marketplace is not impacted." Those are the poor. It is their lot. Some will say: "They have chosen. They're victims of their own making." What a shame.

In 1997, when all the technology is available, nearby, affordable, why do you do this? Why do you mess up what is the most important responsibility, that of having two willing partners take care of the children?

They have the audacity to have among their unit a little brigade called the family values caucus. Well, family values start with child support. That's exactly what it's about. It's not about a conglomerate of people who meet at the Boulevard Club or the Toronto Club. It's about real people who help real people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Comments or questions?

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the remarks of the member for Lake Nipigon. In addition to the services available that I mentioned earlier, there is also a series of public information sessions to be held in 43 communities across Ontario, starting October 22 this year. That's only in a couple of weeks. Those are public information sessions to assist spouses and those involved in the resolution of conflicts arising out of matrimonial breakups in understanding and applying the guidelines.

These are guidelines. They're not written in stone. They can be adjusted. There is provision in the guidelines for the judges reviewing these cases to make adjustments in cases where adjustments are necessary, either up or down, depending, of course, on the needs of the children involved.

The child support guidelines also vary slightly by province because of the different tax levels in the various provinces. Of course the tax levels in this province are going down and will continue to go down due to the efforts of our government to reduce the tax burden on spouses in the province of Ontario.

With respect to negotiations, some parents are naturally concerned about how they resolve the dispute, whether they can resolve it themselves without having to go to court. Indeed they can continue to make agreements, and the judge, should the matter go to court, would look at the guidelines for some guidance and to ensure that there is some conformity with the federal guidelines, soon to become the provincial guidelines, pursuant to Bill 128.

We're ready to implement this legislation now. It is in the best interests of children and families that we act quickly to pass this bill. I urge the members opposite who support the bill to make every effort to get this bill passed quickly for the sake of the children of marital breakups in the province of Ontario.

Mr Bradley: I was pleased that the member for Lake Nipigon was able to draw into his very brief remarks, remarks that are brief because of the new rules of the Legislative Assembly, which confine him to only 10 minutes on major legislation of this kind — but I was pleased he was able to share with members of the Legislative Assembly his view that in moving too quickly and too drastically by closing the eight regional offices, the government had bungled a situation which could have been handled much better.

I think the member would like to see those eight regional offices retained, because he recognizes, being from a riding which extends from Hudson Bay down to Lake Superior — I believe that's correct — larger than many European countries, that the world does not stop and start at the borders of Metropolitan Toronto. Those who had access to the various regional offices do not have access to them now; they must come to the big city. The member for Welland-Thorold tells me there's not a welcome sign outside the offices in Downsview even for MPPs, let alone people who are experiencing direct problems with the financial support office.

Here was a classic example where, even when people agree with you, you hear them say, "I kind of agree with the direction in which they're going, but they're moving too quickly and too drastically and not looking at the consequences of their actions." That is why I believe the member was appropriately pointing this important matter out.

Mr Kormos: Responding to the member for Lake Nipigon, as the member for St Catharines noted, he had a brief 10 minutes, because that's all he's allowed due to the Tory rule changes here. They've restricted comments at this stage of the debate to a mere 10 minutes. The reason they gave was so that more Tory backbenchers could participate in the debates. But take note, they're not standing up and participating in the debate. Somehow they're not interested in letting their constituents know where they stand. They neither understand the legislation nor do they want to speak to it.

Take a look at even the two-minute responses. It's only the member for Durham Centre who has been engaging in two-minute responses. I tell you it's the member for Durham Centre, not because I can see him — all I can see of him is his ankles — but I can recognize his voice. By his voice, I know it's the member for Durham Centre who has monopolized the two-minute response time.

Where are the Tory backbenchers in this piece of legislation and on any other number of pieces of legislation? They're not participating in the debate. They're not standing up here in this forum and letting their constituents and other Ontarians know where they stand.

Yet they rationalized the brutal attack on the House rules by saying: "But we need it. We, as Tory backbenchers, need it." It was: "Tory backbenchers, unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains. We need it so we can participate in debates." They haven't been participating. They've been standing mute on each and every round during the course of Bill 128. Their constituents deserve to hear from them. I say they owe it to their constituents to be participating in this debate and every other debate. They're paid well enough; they should be engaging in their 10-minute spots.

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Mr John R. Baird (Nepean): I want to congratulate my friend from Lac Nipigon for another excellent speech. I'm convinced: I'll vote for the bill, too.

Mr Bernard Grandmaître (Ottawa East): I want to congratulate my friend from Lake Nipigon for highlighting exactly what this bill is all about. I think he's right on. He pointed out that after closing the eight regional offices in the province, this program was doomed to fail. Day after day the minister stands in this House to report the great success of his office and what he has done to improve the system, yet our riding offices are receiving hundreds of phone calls every day complaining about the system and having our own people on hold for 10, 15, 20 minutes, half an hour. The system is not working, and this is what my friend from Lake Nipigon has pointed out. It's not only happening in northern Ontario but right across the province.

We would like the minister to finally stand in this House and say what a failure the system is and how he will improve it. Day after day, he's not giving us any reason to feel happy that these families, these spouses, will receive the moneys that are due. These dollars are due to these spouses, and rightly so.

This government — I want to repeat it — is moving too fast and in the wrong direction. I think it's time that the minister comes very clean with this House and tells us what the real story is behind the failure of his program, so that we will stop asking questions about the program.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Lake Nipigon has two minutes to respond.

M. Bisson : Sur un point d'ordre, M. le Président: Avez-vous changé les règlements de la Chambre? On est supposé de faire quatre rotations, puis on en a fait cinq.

The Acting Speaker: The way I counted was that I counted the members for Durham Centre, St Catharines, Welland-Thorold and Ottawa East.

Mr Christopherson: How about the member for Nepean?

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry. Member for Ottawa East, we'll have to disregard your speech entirely.

Mr Grandmaître: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Are you saying I just wasted two minutes of your time? I think my response was very important. I want it recorded.

The Acting Speaker: I swallowed the whole two minutes, but I can't allow the rest of them to do it; that's all.

The member for Lake Nipigon has two minutes to respond.

Mr Pouliot: I would like to thank the member for Durham Centre, who is most analytical, one of the architects, one of the engineers of the agenda, I trust. He really sticks to the bill, to the written word, because the human dimension, emotion, the way it impacts people, is not always all that becoming. So you go back to the mantra, back to the manifesto and stick to the line by line of the bill.

The member for St Catharines again shared with the House his knowledge of the province of Ontario, not only geographically but the statutes as well. He speaks on almost every bill, and this one will be no exception.

The member for Welland-Thorold: Well, you've heard him. He's the one who broke the story. Talk about investigative politics and journalism. He's the one who, at 4 or 4:30 in the morning, said: "Something must be done. People must find out. They need to be exposed." So he armed himself with courage, went all the way to Downsview and discovered the mess that has been unveiled ever since.

The member for Nepean, a person with ambition, got up. He wants members of his family to know his whereabouts so he wants Hansard to record his comments. There wasn't much else he added. He wanted to say a lot more, but his colleagues would not let him.

The member for Ottawa East, also a friend I value very much, was accorded —

The Acting Speaker: Your time has expired.

Mr Pouliot: — an unprecedented fifth round, Mr Speaker. Thank you for your generosity.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. We're short of time now, due to me.

Further debate?

Mr Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I think we need someone to round out the debate on behalf of the official opposition. I must say, I want to compliment you. I'm not just trying to get in your good books, but you have been an individual sitting in the Chair who has understood, more than anyone I can think of, the need to place something in the context of the entire government program. Every time somebody over there gets up to try to persuade you otherwise, you have been assiduous in carrying out your responsibility to ensure that on any bill spoken upon, a speaker has an opportunity to put things in context.

You're probably wondering how gas prices fit into this piece of legislation. We have to understand that the people who will be affected by this bill are concerned about the rise in gas prices. In fact, what we have seen happening just before the long weekend in St Catharines is an opportunity being taken by many of the large oil companies to hike the gas prices once again. They had come down to about 52.9 cents as a result of the pressure of the opposition in this Legislative Assembly, and now it's up over 57 cents. I'm told that in western Ontario it's again over 60 cents a litre.

What I'm saying is that these people affected by this bill are going to be angry that the government of Ontario has done nothing about the rise in gasoline prices in the province.

The member for Chatham-Kent, when he is travelling in southwestern Ontario, knows that the price of gasoline is very high there. I know that probably, in the confines of the Conservative caucus room, he is imploring the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, begging him indeed, to take some positive action to control the streaks upward in the price of gasoline in this province. He knows what can be done, as you do, Mr Speaker. I have a feeling you support a predatory pricing law in the province, as my friend from Quinte does, a predatory pricing law which does not allow the major oil companies to sell at one price to their own dealers and at a higher price to independent operators, therefore wiping out the independent operators. The people affected by this legislation are hoping that the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations will take such action.

Now, I asked a number of questions in this House, particularly of the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, who has a special interest in this. When I asked him, he gave an honest answer. I want to give him credit for that. His honest answer was: "We have no intention of interfering with the price of gasoline." He said his government would be the laughingstock if he were to interfere with the gas prices in this province.

I can understand why people concerned about this legislation would be phoning me to say, "Now, would you please ensure that until this bill is actually fully in effect, we must deal with gas prices in this province." I have the opportunity to implore the minister again to have his friend the Premier call the major oil barons, the captains of capitalism, into the Premier's office to express that which he expressed in a scrum one day when he was cornered and he said: "I am angry about this. I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to go to the feds."

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He pointed to the feds. That didn't do any good, because he went to a conference of all the premiers and apparently the premiers of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia all said, "No, we're kind of satisfied with a let's-look-into-it attitude," when this Legislature itself can take action on behalf of the consumers in this province. I am concerned that more members of the government caucus have not persuaded the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations to bring in the appropriate legislation and to call the oil barons on the carpet for the gouging of consumers of gasoline in this province.

The people who are affected by this bill as well are very concerned about the Red Cross homemakers and have said they are very concerned that with the limited amount of money they have and with the family support office not operating as it might, we're going to need the Red Cross homemakers and Red Cross home caregivers in action, helping out particularly the seniors in our province. I promised a gentleman who phoned my constituency office that I would find a way of raising this issue this evening. I have done it and I hope the government is listening, because I believe this individual was correct in bringing this to my attention. I'm glad I was able to fit it into my remarks concerning this particular bill.

I am concerned as well that some of the people affected by this bill are going to have a spouse going into the bars and restaurants of this province and using VLTs, video lottery terminals. The video lottery terminals, I would estimate — I know the Speaker well and I can't believe that he would be endorsing the plan of some in the government to place video lottery terminals in every bar and restaurant on every street in every neighbourhood of the towns, villages and cities of Ontario.

I know, for instance, it affects family values so I thought, well, there's a family values caucus in the government caucus and they're going to be speaking. My friend Jim Brown will be leading the charge. He'll be saying, "We can't have these video lottery terminals in Scarborough and other places, because it may drain money away from people who should be paying it into the family support plan, instead of squandering it on electronic slot machines in this province." I am concerned about that.

Also, we must remember the provincial government downloading responsibility and financial obligations to the municipalities. As Mayor Al Unwin said today — he was very confused by the figures that came out today — with that happening, property taxes could rise, and they do not take into account a person's ability to pay. So I wanted to place in the context of the entire government program why this legislation is necessary.

I know a few of them are afraid as well of the use of the College of Teachers to intimidate teachers in this province. I heard a question directed in the House today to the Premier by my colleague from northern Ontario, who said that one of the members, the member for Simcoe East, had informed one of his constituents that he was going to have that constituent, a member of the education profession, reported to the College of Teachers for stirring up trouble, for stirring up opposition to the government. I didn't think, from the speeches I heard on the other side, that the purpose of the College of Teachers was to intimidate people into silence.

I am simply glad the member for Oakville South and the member for Wentworth North are not members of the College of Teachers, because they, along with the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore and a few other dissidents who have dared to speak out, might well be intimidated, using the tool of the College of Teachers to do so.

I want to say it's important that we get this bill through. I want to give an undertaking that this bill will pass this evening, and I think it's going to have support because there's a consensus — my friend from Durham Centre put it appropriately — to synchronize and to coordinate the activities between two levels of government. For that reason, we on this side of the House will be in support of this particular piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Howard Hampton (Rainy River): I want to comment on the comments made by the member for St Catharines. I have never heard anyone so eloquently connect gas prices to child support in my life. It's a testimony to this member's longevity in this House, I believe now 21 years, that he can span the bridge between child support and gas prices.

But of course, there is a theme to this and he has enlightened us all on that theme. This is the government that didn't want these child support guidelines. It's done everything possible to hold off calling second reading of these child support guidelines, just as it did absolutely nothing about high gas prices and just as it wanted to stay away from any discussion about high gas prices.

I give my colleague credit for being able to span the bridge and I also give him credit for being able to make the connection. This is a government that frankly put a bomb in the family support plan and blew it apart, such that literally thousands of women and children across this province could not collect child support. Then, after blowing up the family support plan, they recognized that if the new federal child support guidelines were brought in, they would be completely over their heads again and the whole system would be totally bogged down again and no one would be able to claim support, so they've put it off.

This bill could have been before the Legislature in May. It could have been before the Legislature in June. It could have been before the Legislature in August, in September, and here it is. In the dying days of October, we finally see this piece of legislation. I think it tells us what the priorities of this government really are.

Mr Carroll: Lest the listening audience at home get confused about his comments tonight, because I know how much they enjoy the comments of the member for St Catharines, I just want to set the record straight for those folks watching at home.

Bill 128 is about the family support plan. It really has nothing to do with the College of Teachers, which was recommended by the last royal commission on education. It has nothing to do with the Red Cross pay equity issue, which is a problem currently that was caused by the former Liberal government, wasn't solved by the former NDP government, and which we are now attempting to solve. It isn't about predatory gasoline prices, which have existed for quite some time and were not resolved by the former Liberal government or the former NDP government. It's not about any of those things.

It is about the family support plan, and I don't want the folks at home, who normally listen with great rapture to the comments of the member for St Catharines, to be confused by his comments tonight.

2030

M. Lalonde: C'est toujours un plaisir d'écouter le membre de St Catharines lorsqu'il apporte ses commentaires sur un projet de loi, aujourd'hui le projet de loi 128. Je l'ai peut-être dit en anglais, mais encore une fois, le membre de St Catharines est définitivement au courant des problèmes que ce gouvernement a créés lorsqu'ils ont attendu d'introduire ce projet de loi-là, lorsqu'ils ont décidé de transférer ou de fermer tous les bureaux régionaux, centralisés ici même à Toronto. Nous n'étions pas prêts pour prendre tous les services des huit bureaux régionaux. Nous n'avions pas formé le personnel en conséquence. Donc, nous avons créé des problèmes un peu partout.

Nous voyons aussi qu'il y a plusieurs familles qui sont encore à la recherche d'aide financière afin de récupérer les argents qu'elles ont perdus au moment où elles ont dû emprunter de l'argent pour nourrir leur famille, pour acheter la gazoline, comme on l'avait mentionné tout à l'heure quand on a fait référence à la gazoline. Les dames étaient obligées de se rendre au travail. Elles n'avaient pas les argents nécessaires parce que les argents étaient retenus au bureau ici à Downsview.

Encore une fois, c'est toujours un plaisir de l'entendre en parler parce que lui, il est toujours au courant de ce que le gouvernement a porté. Il prend le temps d'étudier tous les projets de loi. Je félicite le membre de St Catharines. Merci.

Mr Kormos: I appreciate, and so do his constituents, the member from St Catharines participating in this debate and again bringing to this debate issues that directly impact, as he put it, women and kids who are suffering from this government's inaction. It's total, absolute, undeniable, irrefutable incompetence with respect to the handling of the family support plan. The people of St Catharines are pleased that their member spoke to it. By God, the people of Cochrane North are pleased that their member spoke to it. The people of Sault Ste Marie are pleased that their member spoke to it. The people of Hamilton Centre are pleased that their member is going to be speaking to it. The people of Windsor-Riverside are pleased that their member has spoken to it, the people of Lake Nipigon and the rest of those ridings represented by New Democrats.

But I tell you, the people from Sarnia want to know where their member stands. Their member makes a minimum wage here of $78,000 a year. The people of Sarnia want to know where you stand on Bill 128. The people from the riding of Quinte want to know where their member stands on Bill 128. They want to know why he's not participating in this debate.

I put it to the people of Etobicoke-Humber, I know they want to know where their member stands on Bill 128. He's got a minimum wage here of $78,000 a year. Why isn't he participating in this debate? The folks up in York-Mackenzie would dearly like to know why their member isn't participating in this debate — at a minimum wage of $78,000 a year. Here we are at 8:30, and why is the member for York-Mackenzie not participating in this debate? The rules were changed to accommodate these people. The rules were changed to allow the Tory backbenchers, but they don't want to. The question is, why?

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired. The Chair recognizes the member for St Catharines. Two minutes to respond.

Mr Bradley: I thank all of my colleagues for their interventions and their contribution to the debate and their remarks based upon my remarks.

I know that those individuals who are members of the Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation who attended the hamburger fry tonight at Henley Island in St Catharines will now be home watching and will have drawn the conclusion that their member has indeed appropriately included in his remarks a number of issues related to this piece of legislation, and they would want me to mention as well that the real reason we have had a problem with the family support plan at the provincial level is because this government embarked upon an unwise tax cut when the budget was not even balanced, and what they are saying is, "If the budget were balanced, we could understand giving a tax cut." But what happens is, when the budget isn't balanced, the province has to borrow money to give a tax cut, and when it borrows money, it accumulates unnecessarily even more debt in the province. They're wondering why the fiscal Conservatives would do that.

They also see some severe cuts in various government programs, severe cuts to education funding, closing of hospitals across the province, cuts to virtually all services to people in this province so that the Premier can borrow money to give a tax cut which will benefit the wealthiest people in our society to the greatest extent of anyone in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Len Wood: It's a pleasure for me to make a few comments on Bill 128, which is designed to make federal legislation and provincial legislation consistent. In order to have a good debate on Bill 128, it's important that we reflect a little bit. This government is saying they want to make sure the support money is collected and is given to the proper people to make sure the children have a roof over their heads and good food and clothing. The first act this government did was to cut 22% of the money that's used for food and shelter and clothing. That was a sad day in July 1995 when right after being elected the government decided that to be able to give their tax cut, the women and children who were on welfare, social assistance, were the first ones who were going to have to pay their share towards giving a tax break, 30%, to the wealthiest people in this province, and it hasn't ended there.

We know that during the Common Sense Revolution, a promise was made out there that if the Conservative government was elected they would lay off 15,000 or 20,000 civil servants, and they are proceeding along that line. About a year ago now, they decided to close eight of the family support offices around this province, fire all the employees, put everything into transports and have it all moved to downtown Toronto. That's not what they said

during the campaign in 1995 in the Common Sense Revolution. They said they were not going to centralize everything in Toronto, and yet we see them doing that, as I said, putting everything into boxes.

As a result of that happening, they moved everything into a warehouse in Downsview and nothing happened. The computers that were put in there weren't hooked up, the telephones weren't hooked up. The member for Welland-Thorold and the member for Sudbury East had to go over there, do a video, walk in through the front door — no security around. The boxes were there half opened and all the files were there, and nothing was being done. Week after week and day after day in this Legislature, the Attorney General was saying, "It's only a computer glitch and everything is going to be all right," and yet we still see, a year later, that in my office the staff are still working on files where they haven't been able to resolve the problem that was caused by Mike Harris and the Attorney General.

The Attorney General was incompetent in closing down those offices when he had no staff trained to take their places, and the Premier has refused to replace him as a result. The Attorney General is still there acting in the same incompetent mode that he was a year ago, and women and children are suffering. They're paying the price as a result of Mike Harris not being prepared to make a cabinet shuffle and get people who are competent, if there are any over there, into the positions to do the job and make sure the money flows.

We know that the government whip and the government House leader are all upset that we're debating Bill 128 tonight. They wanted a couple of speakers on it, and it would fly through and be voted on and that would be it. That's their responsibility, to make sure they bring their legislation forward in an orderly fashion. They could have done this over a year ago, and yet last spring, or during the winter sitting, they decided that rule changes were more important. We listened to the member for Nepean saying the government backbenchers don't have enough time to speak. Their priority was to get rule changes in, so we debated them continuously for a couple of weeks and, as a result, they brought in time allocation and rammed the rule changes through.

2040

Just to make sure people realize this is not a rerun from this afternoon, here we are tonight, sitting in the Legislature until midnight to make sure we cooperate in getting through legislation that has to be passed. It's important that we have our turn at debating these things, yet not one single Conservative backbencher has got up and spoken on it. This is why they said they needed the rule changes, so they could have their turn at speaking, yet we've been debating this piece of legislation now for over two and a half hours and not one single Conservative backbencher has got up to take the five or 10 minutes they're allotted to speak on Bill 128.

If the bill was that important, they would have been up on their feet, as they were with Bill 160, the legislation they're bringing in against the kids in this province. They're determined to force a province-wide strike by taking money out of the classrooms and attacking the 2.2 million children in this province through the teachers. As a result, we're headed for a province-wide shutdown. What we should be doing is talking about amendments that could be brought in so we avoid the complete shutdown that could happen within a couple of days.

Our leader Howard Hampton questioned Mike Harris six different questions today in question period: "Mr Premier, when are you going to take a stand and make sure that all the classrooms are not shut down completely?" He refused to answer. He stood in his place and referred the question to another incompetent minister, the Minister of Education, who has already said, "In order to take money out of the education system I have to make sure there is a genuine crisis in education." He's created the crisis and now we're faced with the situation where the Premier is not prepared to get involved. He got involved with Bill 136, the legislation about hospitals and municipalities where amalgamations were taking place, but he's refusing to get involved in this, even though over the last year they've taken over $800 million out of education on an annualized basis. They're saying they want to get another $1 billion out to give to the finance minister so he can give it to the wealthiest people in this province. It's only the 10% upper-income people in this province who are going to benefit from any tax break, and it's all borrowed money.

There is still a deficit in this province built up over 40 years of prior Conservative governments until 1985. They never balanced a budget; they ran deficits every year and added to the debt. Now, 10 years later, they're back in and they're borrowing money to give a tax break. When you borrow money, you add to the debt, and it's continuing to grow.

They want the women and children and the teachers and all the public sector workers to pay for the tax break they're giving. Looking at Bill 128, if this government were concerned about making sure that women and children, especially children, get the money they should be getting during a family breakup, they wouldn't be doing their cuts and closing down all the family support offices right across this province and laying off the employees. It's quite obvious they don't care.

As I said earlier, we're debating Bill 128. There are a number of other members who want to speak on this bill, and I'm sure, from the look on their faces, that some of the Conservative members would like to speak. But even with the new rule changes that have been brought in, they've been muzzled by the government whip and the government House leader and the Premier. They're saying, "No, you people can't get up and speak on this, because we don't want you to speak on it."

If there are other reasons that they're not willing to get on their feet from now until midnight to talk about a good piece of legislation — we've all talked about how we're planning to support Bill 128. We think it's a good idea for federal and provincial legislation to be consistent and to make sure that for children involved in a family breakup,

as the money is taken off the paycheque and sent in to the Attorney General, he would send this money out. But it's quite obvious that he's not doing that, even though we have Bill 128.

As long as we continue to have the incompetence of the Attorney General in that office, we're going to have problems with the family support plan and it's going to continue to cause a mess throughout the province. The only way to do that is for Mike Harris and his whiz kids to design a new cabinet and get some of these incompetent people out of there.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton North): It's my pleasure to do a response to the member's speech. My opening comment is: muzzled, my ass. The leader of the third party wanted to know why the backbenchers won't speak up on this issue. Let me tell you why. You know why? I am speaking up on behalf of this bill because we've got two organizations in Brampton called Families Against Deadbeats and Mothers Against Deadbeats. FAD and MAD are 180% behind this bill and every initiative this government has taken in defence of our issues for the family support plan.

Mr Pouliot: Why don't you speak French?

Mr Spina: I don't have to speak French because people understand everything that I have to say.

These blowhards in the opposition parties really turn my stomach, because it's the coal calling the kettle black. The coal has been in office for five years. What did they do? They did zip, absolutely zip for the family support plan. If they're the coal calling the kettle black, they are in the coalpit, and that's where they stand.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I want to caution the members that I'm having difficulty hearing. I would like to be able to make sure that things are parliamentary, so if you would just hold it down. I realize that there's somewhere else you may want to be; if you continue, you will be. Let's give the speaker the attention he deserves.

Mr Bradley: I am surprised that there would be disparaging remarks made about those who work in coal mines. It appears the member has made a reference to coal miners. I'm surprised to hear that.

Second, I can't wait — because there's going to be an opportunity — for a member of the family values caucus of the Conservative caucus to rise in the House to express objection to the kind of language which was used by the member for Brampton North. I read the literature when it came out during the election campaign and I've seen some subsequent. I know they have the meetings of the family values coalition within the government. They must be shocked and astonished at many expressions which were used by the member for Brampton North. At the very least, one would hope that on Sunday morning, or whatever day of the week that some worship, there will be a prayer for forgiveness for the member for Brampton North, who has used expressions which I have never heard in my life, expressions which I simply cannot believe would be heard in one of the secret meetings of the family values caucus. I hope that can be done.

I'm glad the member for Cochrane North mentioned the field of education and the fact that this government is trying to provoke a major confrontation with those who deliver educational services on the front line in this province, the dedicated and hardworking and very needed teachers of this province. I commend him on that.

2050

Mr Pouliot: "Appalled" and "shocked" do not suffice. Following the remarks of my friend and colleague from Cochrane North, the opportunity afforded the member for Brampton North — I toiled for 20 years in a mine, and he, in his unique, vulgar style has chosen to minimize that and those contributions. I am appalled and shocked because, when I was first honoured by being elected here in 1985, 13 years ago, I thought decorum and good manners while responding to colleagues were the order of the day. These profanities do the Legislative Assembly of Ontario the worst disservice.

It is not comical. Humour does not become the member for Brampton North. That we know. That is obvious. Never did I think that one day Parliament, our Parliament, would be turned into a tombola, a cheap carnival, by way of his contributions, Speaker. You, sir, who are the ultimate authority in this House, could have stood up at your post like a sentry and defended our institution by asking him to withdraw his remarks.

The Acting Speaker: I would like to say two things. The first thing is that the comments and questions are supposed to be towards the speech given and the speaker. The second thing I want to say is that the Chair has a little latitude, and I'm familiar that the member for Prince Edward-Lennox-South Hastings is the owner of donkeys, so I try to give the benefit to the person using words.

I recognize the member for London South.

Mr Bob Wood (London South): The member spoke very clearly.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Cochrane North has two minutes to respond.

Mr Martin: No: one, two, three — oh, Wood used it up? What a waste, what a complete waste. Honest to God, in this place, when we fight for every second to say what we have to say, he stands up and uses five seconds and then it's all over? The member for St Catharines should be shocked and appalled.

Mr Len Wood: I'm sure there was a misunderstanding there, Speaker. I wonder if we could have the clock reset at the two minutes, because I want to respond to the member for St Catharines and the member for Lake Nipigon. They made very kind remarks.

It's quite obvious that the member for Brampton North's constituents will judge him as copies of Hansard are sent out to all his constituents. They'll be the judge of his comments. He has all kinds of opportunity to stand here and speak for 10 minutes and give some constructive words to the different legislation, but instead, he is more concerned with attacking the remarks made by another member and attacking the miners.

But we're at a situation now where I think it's very serious. We're dealing with Bill 128 at a time when Mike

Harris and John Snobelen have created a serious crisis. They've worked at it for two and a half years and they finally have a crisis in this province, where all the children, 2.2 million children in this province, are being attacked by the Conservative government through Bill 160. They're trying to force a confrontation and a province-wide shut-down, all the classrooms right across this province. They should be ashamed of themselves, especially when the Premier is refusing to intervene.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr Kormos: But where are the Tories?

Mr Christopherson: I want to pick up on the comments of my colleague from Welland-Thorold, both just as I was rising and as he has raised in his two-minute responses.

It wasn't all that long ago when the Tory government changed the rules, shortened the amount of time the opposition had to offer up, under the glare of public scrutiny, opposition to what they're doing, mainly because they said they wanted more members to speak. Specifically, they said they weren't getting their turn, and that somehow justified muzzling the official opposition and the third party from offering up their thoughts on the legislation of the day.

What we have here, and it probably doesn't come across as well to those who are at home — why would it? They don't know the rules, obviously, as well as we do. In this debate there's rotation, so after the government leads off, then the official opposition puts up a speaker, then the third party, then back to the government and then over to the opposition, and we go around in rotation. My colleague from Welland-Thorold, underscored by my colleague from Cochrane North, have pointed out that when it comes to the government's turn, they all sit. Not one of them stands up. They took away our right to speak so they'd have more, and then they have their turn, they sit there. That's the point my colleague is making.

We heard the member for Brampton North, when he was asked by the member from Welland-Thorold, who sits just two seats over from him, why he isn't speaking, say, "Well, I'm speaking now." Again, if you don't know the rules, that sounds like a plausible response. But the fact is that these are — very short, actually — 10-minute speeches, followed by four two-minute responses, again in rotation. That was merely a two-minute response. That was not the member from Brampton North taking his place and speaking on behalf of his constituents. It was not that.

Also, when the member for Nepean and the member for London South stood up and used five seconds, the whole point was to use up one of those four responses. That's why they got up and gave some cavalier little throwaway line about, "Yeah, I agree," or "You've convinced me to vote," and sat down, because it denied the opposition members the opportunity to use that two minutes to engage in constructive debate.

If nothing else, since we all agree by and large on this legislation — and I'm going to come to why that is in a moment — perhaps the real lesson here tonight is to point out once and for all, and let there be no doubt, that the government's intent when they shut down the rules and shut down our ability to debate was to muzzle the opposition. It had nothing to do with extending democratic rights to other members of this House.

I also want to mention that while we've been listening to members of the government talk about the wonderful things they are doing, that they brought this legislation forward and they ought to get all kinds of credit for what they have done, two things need to be said.

First, my leader has already mentioned and I'm sure he will advance it again when he speaks next that if it were that important, if they really cared that much about children and kids, it could have been brought up a lot earlier on the calendar. This is the government that brought us back early because they said they had all this work to do. So they had every opportunity to do that, and the fact that it's here on the second-to-last day of this session shows that wasn't the case.

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Another other thing needs to be said, and I've gone through the Hansards before I spoke to see, overall, what's been said on Bill 128. The reality is that not one government member has mentioned the fact that what is contained in this bill started with the previous government. I know. I was there. The discussions took place at federal-provincial justice ministers' conferences. That's where the idea is from of a new federal approach that hopefully all the provinces would buy into.

We know how the process works. There are all kinds of staff meetings that take place — and this is appropriate, by the way, it happens under every government — staff meetings trying to lay the groundwork, find out where the problems are, bring those problems back to the respective ministers in their provinces, their cabinets would deal with it and you sort of worked it through. At the end of the day the goal, and in this case it has worked, is to provide federal legislation announced by the federal justice minister, led by the federal Parliament. Once that's in place, right behind that — that hasn't happened here because it's been longer than it should have — the various parliaments of the provinces follow suit and make sure their legislation is in sync with the federal legislation that they have passed.

Obviously that takes a while, longer than we'd all like to see, but it's understandable. There's an awful lot to coordinate and that's not the only business of governments at any given time, so it has taken a number of years. But the reality is that not one of the government members — I stand to be corrected and if I am wrong and someone can show me in the Hansard where I am wrong, then I will apologize. I do not see in the Hansards in this debate where anyone, in particular the ministers, has recognized that it was Marion Boyd as the Attorney General in the Rae government who initiated these discussions with the federal government on behalf of Ontario.

I grant you that the Tory government, the current provincial government, brought it across the finish line, and for that we acknowledge that you've done it and we

intend to support that legislation here today by way of showing our support. We're prepared to give the credit. But just like last evening, where we had a similar example of the government refusing to acknowledge and give credit where credit was due, again no one from the government — and it should have been the Attorney General — stood up and acknowledged that it was our Attorney General, Marion Boyd, who initiated these discussions and took them at least halfway, if not further. I was there as our Solicitor General and I watched and participated in those discussions. She should get that credit. She has just walked in here, and if you won't give it to her, we'll give her that credit. Boy, talk about natural timing. Way to go. And it really wasn't set up.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: It's just one of the members who wouldn't know what he's talking about saying, "Oh, tell us another one." That's the truth. Can't you accept the fact that other people do good things and have good intentions besides you? No, you don't. You don't even have the decency or the humility because you're too caught up in your arrogance to give somebody credit who deserves it. Go back to sleep.

The last thing I want to mention on this, and my time is just about up, is that the government should still be hanging their heads in shame for what they did with the family support plan. That Attorney General, stood in his place day after day and said: "Everything is fine. I'm fixing it. It's better than it used to be. Don't worry about it." The reality was not seen until the members for Sudbury East and Welland-Thorold went out, got it on video, brought back the truth, held a news conference and then the minister had to admit: "You're right. It's not up and running the way I said."

After that moment, he talked about the fact that, "Right, it wasn't perfect yesterday but it's perfect today." From that moment forward we've been showing example after example where that's not the case. Women and children were being unnecessarily hurt. You were told that was going to happen. We have the staff reports that show if you close those regional offices, a lot of people are going to get hurt in the transition. You ignored that in your race to find the $5 billion needed to pay for your tax cut, and if you ran over innocent women and children, that's just tough luck for them and that's the way you've always viewed the vulnerable in our society. That's why, although we intend to support this, we're going to hold you accountable for what you've done to the women and children of this province.

The Acting Chair: Comments and questions?

Mr Bob Wood: The member was articulate.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I certainly want to commend the member for bringing this government appropriately to task for the legislation it had to be forced to bring in. It was initiated elsewhere. We want to give credit, but it is hard, given the fact that this fits into a context for this government. It's a context of a government that has chosen, perhaps not wilfully — we'd all like to believe it wasn't to their knowledge when it happened, but has the knowledge about it now. They know they've hurt women and children. They know they've done that because they cut welfare 22%. They know there are families who are having a tough time eating and providing clothes for their kids and having any decent quality of life for themselves. They're going through the toughest time in their lives and this government decided to economize on them.

At the same time, this government decided to economize, to take money away in almost the worst example of cynical government, in the case of the family support plan. So at the very time that we're talking about guidelines that would help make uniform, fair and adequate the kind of money that should be done in terms of family breakups, a predictable thing that happens in our society that we should be prepared to deal with in a fulsome kind of way, we're here instead, bringing this in kicking and screaming. We had to go through the excruciating family support plan bumble on the part of this government, which it may not have known about the first couple of days, but it knew about day after day.

It continues. Even to the present day we have families who have cheques tied up in this bureaucracy created by this government which believes in unelected commissions, in centralized things that we haven't seen anywhere outside of the Soviet Politburo, but no commitment to the people. We'll give you credit for the content of this bill, but you certainly contradict in a very, very strong way, as the speaker mentioned, the spirit of it.

Mr Kormos: The member for Hamilton Centre, Mr Christopherson, hit the nail right on the head. The fact is that the government dragged its heels on Bill 128. The government could have brought 128 before this House not just months ago but literally years ago, because, as the member for Hamilton Centre points out, the groundwork had already been laid.

What was the government more interested in doing? Why was it that it couldn't deal with Bill 128 more promptly? What was higher on their list of priorities? Let me remind you. They were far speedier to slash assistance to moms and their kids, to single parents, by almost 22%. They were so eager to do that, they did that literally within weeks of being elected to power.

Maybe Bill 128 could have come next. No, they were too busy at the trough, giving themselves salary increases to the tune of $3 million a year — big, fat, porcine salary increases for big, fat, porcine Tories, after beating up on social assistance recipients to the tune of 22%, and that's what displaced any focus on Bill 128. As the member for Hamilton Centre pointed out, the groundwork had been laid: salary increases for MPPs, for Tory backbenchers, perks coming out of their ying-yangs and social assistance recipients suffer 22% cuts. Women and kids relying upon the family support plan suffer and suffer, and Bill 128, the groundwork already having been laid, gets deferred until the fall of 1997.

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Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the remarks of the member for Hamilton Centre. They were characterist-

ically loud. They were not in the nature of debate with respect to this piece of legislation, Bill 128. Debate with respect to this legislation would require some rational presentation of arguments pro and con or some suggestion with respect to amendments. None of that has been heard here in this place this evening.

The reason why our members are not speaking with respect to the bill in debate is that no debate is taking place. There are no opposing points of view. It's been clear that the members of the official opposition and the members of the third party support the bill.

I have longer to speak. I'm not going to use the time because we think this time could be better used debating bills with respect to which there is actually true debate, as opposed to posturing with respect to bills that all parties support. In the interests of the children in Ontario, I urge the members to get on with this bill and deal with it promptly so that these family support guidelines can be put in place.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Hamilton Centre has two minutes to respond.

Mr Christopherson: I thank all the members who took the time to respond. To the member for London South, thank you for the compliment, although I think you further proved my point, but I always appreciate the compliment. I thank the member for York South for acknowledging the intent and the spirit of what I was trying to convey in the short time I had.

One can never say enough about the member for Welland-Thorold, particularly when you want to thank him for his contribution to anything, because anything he is involved in is always a contribution. I think his comment about how quickly this government ran with glee to announce the 22% cut to the income of the poorest of the poor is well placed and that history will show that was one of the darkest days in the history of Ontario, when this government did that and did it with such happiness and such delight.

To the member for Durham Centre I say that I think the fact that I attempted to correct the record, given where your government did not give some credit to a fellow parliamentarian who deserves it, is well placed and is indeed part of the debate around Bill 128. I would say to the honourable member that his problem and the reason he wants to move off this is that Bill 128 gives us an opportunity to talk about the family support plan. Of course, that's legitimate, because if you look in the Hansard, your own Attorney General, in kicking off the debate, talked about the family support plan, so it's very relevant.

What you don't want to hear is the opposition. You don't want to hear criticism. You don't want to hear anything that isn't a stroking of your ego, telling you you're doing the right thing. The reality is that you're not doing the right thing. If you were listening to people other than your corporate pals, you'd find out there are a lot of people who are pleased that we are taking you to task on the family support plan.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Hampton: I'm quite pleased to have an opportunity to make a few comments. I think it's important to get comments on the record in this debate. It's important that we note what is being attempted here both on the part of the federal government and what I think is being attempted on the part of the provincial government.

First of all, I simply want to dwell for a minute on the principle that is at stake here. The reality is that not just in Ontario but across Canada, across North America, when families split, when couples split, all the statistical evidence shows that the income of men goes up and the income of women and children goes down. This has been an ongoing problem. The whole idea of having some child support guidelines is to try to even out the balance, in fact to try to create a better balance.

This is something I was pleased to work on when I was Attorney General of the province and that I know my colleague and successor, the member for London Centre, was very pleased to work on and push. We were very pleased to see the federal government, over a year ago now, bring forward this legislation. But I have to say to you that I was quite puzzled to see other provincial governments across this country pass into law their companion legislation. Other provincial governments across this country passed into law their companion child support legislation quite a long time, quite some time ago.

The question arises: Why has it take the Conservative government so long in Ontario? When other governments were passing their legislation into law in March and April of this year, certainly by May of this year, why are we only now on second reading of this legislation in Ontario?

I want to tell people why, because it's very important. This legislation is important. It is important that this get passed into law. What's more, it's important that it be proclaimed and it's important that there be a strategy to implement these child support guidelines. If you don't have a strategy to implement it, it becomes rather empty and we continue to see women and children living in poverty.

Why did this government take so long? A very simple answer: This government so botched the family support plan, it so destroyed the family support plan, it so overwhelmed the resources in the family support plan that if this government had brought this legislation to this House any sooner and had it passed into law any sooner than this, we would have had continuing and worsening chaos in the family support plan throughout the spring, throughout the summer, throughout this fall, throughout the next winter. That is why there has been seven months' delay. That's why we're only now on second reading, because the so-called Family Responsibility Office still can't handle the chaos that your Attorney General, that your government created for women and children across this province.

You know it from the experience in your own constituency offices, where you still receive not tens but tens upon tens upon tens of phone calls every week from women complaining that they can't get a response from the so-called Family Responsibility Office. They're still not getting the cheque they need to feed their children;

they're still not getting the cheque they need to pay the rent; they're still not getting the cheque they need to pay for the electricity, to keep a phone in the House. Why? Because this government would rather take the money from the family support plan and use it to finance a tax cut for the very wealthy in this province. They'd rather do that than look after women and children who need the support, pure and simple.

That is why we are here in October, seven months later, and we're only seeing this bill for second reading when other provinces have already passed theirs into law, when other provinces are already implementing theirs. But it doesn't end there. You see, if the government were really serious about this, they would have shown us their implementation strategy. They would have shown us how the variations of child support orders are going to be accommodated in our courtrooms across Ontario, how they're going to be implemented and the variation orders are going to be obtained in a speedy way, in an orderly way, in a way which does not result in undue hardship and undue delay for all those women and children who need variations in the child support orders, who simply need support. But we haven't seen an implementation plan. What it says to me, not having seen the implementation plan, is that we're simply going to see more delay.

We already know there are backlogs out there in the family courts. Talk to any family court judge in this province and they will tell you that chaos reigns every day. They will tell you, in fact, that as family court judges they spend a lot of their time trying to help people who come before the courts because the government has so underfunded the system that people can't get any help. So judges are not only judges, but they have become almost judge-advocates in terms of trying to usher these cases through the courts.

We haven't seen an implementation plan from the Attorney General, which leads me to believe that this legislation is not going to be implemented in an orderly way. It leads me to believe that we're going to see more and more women and children clogging up the courts, trying to get a variation order so they can get enough money to feed themselves, enough money to pay their rent, enough money to pay the electricity, enough money to keep the phone connected. That's where we're at.

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That's why I think this is delayed. That's why we haven't seen an implementation strategy. Because this government knows it is completely incapable of implementing this legislation right now, so they're trying to slow it down, trying to take as long as possible in implementing this very necessary piece of legislation. What is that going to mean? As we have seen already, it's going to mean that more and more children, more and more women who need child support, spousal support or a variation order are not going to receive it. We're going to see this government continue to inflict hardship on some of the most vulnerable people in this province.

As I say, this government would rather give a tax gift to their wealthy friends than look after the proper implementation of support guidelines, than look after the proper implementation of the variation of child support orders. That's the real agenda of this government. Women and children to the back of the bus; the wealthy Bay Street crowd to the front, come and get your tax cut. That's where we're at.

I want to say something about the absolute silence on the part of the Conservative members here tonight. We heard, chapter and verse, from the government members last spring when they were trying to ram through their draconian rule changes, when they were trying to do away with democracy in this place. We heard them say that opposition opportunity for debate and opposition opportunity for questioning ought to be limited so that more government members could take part in a debate like this. We heard them say over and over again that if government members had more opportunity to debate, they would stand up and debate and they would take part in these important discussions. Where are they tonight?

This is very important legislation. It involves putting food on the table for children who don't have food. It involves paying the rent for women and children who are having a tough time paying the rent. It involves being able to pay the electricity bill, being able to pay the phone bill. This is very important legislation. I would have thought we would have had government members on their feet talking about how quickly this is going to be passed, talking about the implementation plan, talking about how they're going to ensure that there is no backlog in the courts in terms of obtaining the variation orders. I would have thought we would have heard all that tonight from the government members. But we haven't heard a thing.

It's as if this important legislation, it's as if these important child support guidelines, it's as if these important variation orders don't matter to the Conservative caucus. They don't care about this. This is the Conservative caucus that loves to crow about cutting social assistance for children, who make up more than 50% of the recipients of social assistance, but when it comes to helping those children, doing something forward, the whole Conservative caucus is silent.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Flaherty: I listened with interest to the comments of the member for Rainy River. If he is concerned about our members speaking about how quickly the legislation should go and implementation, these matters have already been addressed in this debate in this House at some length. This is the fourth day of debate on second reading.

Mr Hampton: Let's see your implementation plan.

Mr Flaherty: I'm sure that had my honourable friend been here earlier, he would have heard the implementation plan, but I will repeat for him. This is the fourth day of debate on second reading of this bill. You can check Hansard if you need to check it.

There's a toll-free number to inform people. There are consumer information kits, more than 58,000 of which have already been sent out to people in Ontario. There is a series of public information hearings commencing October 22 in 43 communities across the province. The courts are

ready to implement the guidelines. The court staff have been briefed on the guidelines and are prepared to deal with them. The court staff have been informing people who have been coming to see them of what the guidelines involve. The courts themselves are prepared to deal with the increased demand.

The implementation plan is in place. We're ready to proceed. The difficulty is getting the bill passed. This is the fourth time on second reading that we're having a so-called debate. We're not having a debate concerning Bill 128. No one disagrees with Bill 128, including the member who just spoke. So what are we debating? Other matters. But if we care about implementing Bill 128, if we care about getting these guidelines applied to children of marital breakdown in the province, then we should move the bill forward so that the plan can be implemented for the benefit of all the kids in the province.

Mr Kennedy: I certainly want to commend the member for Rainy River for having brought out this aspect of the legislation. Everybody in this House knows that if this government wants to pass a bill, they'll pass a bill. Instead, we have the obfuscation we have just heard in the response.

It's very, very important to know what the defining characteristics of this government are, and that comes from the choices they made. They had choices whether to punish people on social assistance first, they had choices whether to put these guidelines in place in an expeditious manner that reflected the dignity of what's required in terms of people being able to live under the difficult circumstance of a family that is broken down, and the choice was made not to.

The choice has been made to do many other things, to close hospitals, to ram through legislation merging cities, to do all manner of things, but when it comes down to the human touch, to making government work for people at the time of their life when they need it to, when they are facing a judge and they are facing a definition for at least several months if not many years of their lives, instead of dealing with a progressive amendment, we have had to deal with this as a back-burner priority of this government.

It is certainly something this government has to stand to account for, because the public recognizes this as part of a pattern, a pattern that would allow a government to take money from families, money that is intended to support children, specifically and explicitly a trust matter on the part of the government, and to botch that in case after case. In that case you have government money tied up, but the money that belongs to those children is ground up in this government's effort to pay for an unreasonable tax cut in an unreasonable length of time. This bill will not clear the bar in terms of exonerating this government from that sad record when it comes to women and children.

Mr Bisson: I couldn't agree more with the comments from my leader, the honourable Howard Hampton, leader of the New Democratic Party. He is perfectly right. This government is good at one thing and one thing only, and that's the politics of blame. They blame everybody in Ontario for everything that is going on in the world, and they have the gall to come into this House and try to make the people of the province believe that they can't pass a bill with the majority they have in this House. Give your head a shake. You're the government that came in here with the rule changes that allow you to pass absolutely any bill you want, given the draconian rule changes you have, so don't come into this House and start telling us all of a sudden that you can't pass a bill.

The reason we in the New Democratic Party are speaking to this bill is that your government, your Attorney General, Charles Harnick, messed up the family support plan system to where hundreds and thousands of women were not able to get access to the support payments. Your minister bungled it. He closed down eight regional offices, lost the files, shipped them to Downsview, and it wasn't until Peter Kormos and Shelley Martel exposed the blunder that you guys were forced to move. So if we're speaking to the bill, it's for a reason. If you're not speaking to the bill, it tells me that you have a problem, and the problem is you hang your head down low when it comes to this issue because you know you've bungled it up.

The other point I want to make on this debate we're having here is, if we were trying to hold it up so much, why are we then agreeing to give you a voice vote at the end of second reading of this bill? Our caucus has said we're prepared to give you a voice vote, which will happen within the next few minutes, an indication that we're not trying to hold up this bill at all. We're trying to raise the legitimate issues that people raise in our constituency office about the bungling of the family support plan. I hope you don't do what you did the last time you tried to move on this issue, and that is to pass a bill and then not proclaim it for some six months after. I hope at least you have the nerve to do it this time.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): I'm disappointed in all the rhetoric and hyperbole we're hearing tonight. We believe very earnestly in the necessity to pass this bill quickly, and it is for that reason that we haven't been getting up and speaking to it tonight. We thought the opposition parties also believed in the necessity of passing this quickly, and I urge them to stop the rhetoric tonight and to pass it.

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The Acting Speaker: The member for Rainy River has two minutes to respond.

Mr Hampton: I'm pleased to respond to the comments of some of the Conservative members because I want to ask them directly: Where was this bill in May? Why didn't you bring it forward for second reading then? Where was it in June? Why didn't you bring it forward for second reading then? Where was it in August? Why didn't you bring it forward for second reading then? Where was it in September? Why didn't you bring it forward for second reading then?

Why have we seen you diddle around back and forth with Bill 136? First you're going to take it ahead, then you're going to take it back. Why have we watched you

bring in draconian pieces of legislation which were intended to hammer teachers, which were intended to go after ambulance drivers, nurses, child care workers, firefighters, police officers? We saw all that, but at no time did we see the child support guidelines. So don't come in here and lecture us about how badly you want to pass this legislation. If you wanted to pass it, it could have been passed in May, it could have been passed in June, it could have been passed in July, it could have been passed in August, it could have been passed in September.

You were too busy ramming home your right-wing agenda. You were too busy out there putting in legislation to hammer teachers. You were too busy going after the child care workers, the nurses, the ambulance attendants, the firefighters, the police officers. You were too busy implementing your right-wing agenda to ever worry about child support guidelines for women and children who are in need.

Mr Wettlaufer: What a hypocrite.

Mr Hampton: So don't come here and lecture the opposition about this legislation. You have bungled this file from the beginning and you deserve to be held accountable for bungling this file from the beginning.

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired.

I would ask the member for Kitchener to withdraw that remark, please.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: No, please take your seat.

Mr Wettlaufer: I withdraw that.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: I rise to the defence of the member for Kitchener. He's a damn fool. He doesn't know any better.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Harnick has moved second reading of Bill 128. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? It is carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Agreed.

GOVERNMENT PROCESS SIMPLIFICATION ACT (MINISTRY OF HEALTH), 1996

LOI DE 1996 VISANT À SIMPLIFIER LES PROCESSUS GOUVERNEMENTAUX AU MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ

Mr Tim Hudak (Niagara South): I move third reading of Bill 67, An Act to simplify government processes and to improve efficiency in the Ministry of Health / Projet de loi 67, Loi visant à simplifier les processus gouvernementaux et à améliorer l'efficience au ministère de la Santé.

It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 67 this evening, which is an important step and another step in the government's plan and overall commitment, as well as the ministry's, to reduce red tape and unnecessary regulation among the health care sectors, the institutions, businesses and the health care providers.

Every hour spent filling out unnecessary forms, going through heavy red tape is an hour not spent on front-line services by our excellent practitioners throughout Ontario, an hour taken away from their time treating patients, an hour taken away from their time managing our health care system to ensure resources go to the right place at the right time.

By reducing the red tape and regulation we can allow the practitioners in Ontario to become more efficient and better meet the needs of Ontarians and their patients. For example, removing the requirement for cabinet to approve routine decisions made in the ministry or by other institutions, taking that stack of papers across the road to the cabinet office merely to be checked off, routine checkmarks, and that entire stack then brought back — when the decision's already made and covered under different statutes or other pieces of legislation — is an enormous amount of time wasted in merely pushing paper.

In this legislation, for every converted regulation-making power, the ministry will save over 74 hours of paper pushing functions; for every one of these converted regulations, it would've cost the health care system 74 hours of paper pushing. The ministry processes about 50 regulations per year and there are 180 purely administrative regulations on backlog. That's two years of red tape on backlog, simply checking off boxes and filling out forms that are already done through different statutes and acts.

Another important reason I support Bill 67, and encourage all members of the House to do so, is because this also supports the significant work that's been done to streamline business in the Ministry of Health since we've taken office in July of 1995.

Let me tell you a couple of things this builds upon. We've simplified hospital budget reporting to take out some of the more arcane rules that took up a lot of resources to ensure hospital budget reporting is streamlined so that essential time is devoted instead to patient care rather than filling out forms and going through a lot of hoops.

Important too — we spoke about this in the House many times — we simplified the drug submission and review regulations for faster processing. Instead of the things we've seen in the past where drugs were lined up to come on the formulary, for months and years at the door because they had to go through a lot of different red tape provisions that had already been done in different areas, we've allowed, through the streamlining, much quicker movement of drugs on the formulary to treat patients in Ontario.

To stress this, 500 new drugs have been put on the ODB formulary since we've taken office, an expansion of those drugs and a quicker movement of those drugs on the formulary so they can get out to the pharmacies, to the doctors' offices and to the patients across Ontario. What a contrast, I would say, to previous governments that had these drugs lined up for years on end to come on to the formulary, a sharp contrast to the previous government that delisted 260 drugs. We've gone the other way: 500 new drugs on more quickly, compared to 260 drugs taken off by the previous government.

Another important reform we've made to lower red tape and regulation is one-stop health care shopping for home care and placement coordination services. The community care access centres, the CCACs, 43 of them across the province, will allow seniors to have one window for their health care needs for home care and placement services.

Mr Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold): What does it have to do with the bill?

Mr Hudak: The member for Welland-Thorold asks what it has to do with the bill. I'm saying it supports the movement we've already made in this ministry to streamline our businesses and our —

Mr Kormos: It sounds like you are building bridges here. You are like Jim Bradley. You've got to speak to the bill.

Mr Hudak: I try to learn from the veteran members. I'll direct my comments to the Speaker.

Mr Kormos: You are the parliamentary assistant. You've got to address Bill 67.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Gilles E. Morin): The member for Welland-Thorold.

Mr Kormos: Sorry, Speaker.

Mr Hudak: As the member for Welland-Thorold knows, this is important, the things we've already done in the ministry to streamline our affairs, to ensure that resources are devoted to the patient as quickly as possible at the right place at the right time. I'll give the House a few more examples of things we're doing in this bill, in Bill 67.

For example, the Ambulance Act: We're going to remove the requirement the minister approve the application to incorporate businesses that supply ambulance services because they're already incorporated in another area. What the ministry should concentrate on, and does, is to make sure that the requirements to operate an ambulance, supply equipment and training are granted through a licensing procedure, but we see no reason to duplicate the application for incorporation.

2140

The Health Protection and Promotion Act we're changing, removing the power of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the cabinet, to make regulations respecting slaughterhouses because slaughterhouses are already regulated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Why do you need two pieces of legislation to govern the exact same thing?

Another good example, and there are dozens — I'll give three more and allow for other members to participate in the debate. The Cancer Remedies Act will also be changed because the Regulated Health Professions Act already deals with protecting citizens from harm from improper approaches to cancer care. This act was 1938, and perhaps at that time there were some alleged cancer cures that may not have been good medicine. But we have other legislation that governs the health professions to ensure that proper care is taken of patients.

The War Veterans Burial Act was enacted in 1935. It provided for municipalities to pay for a veteran's burial, but not exceeding the sum of $15. Now, $15 won't get you very far these days, as you know. That was a piece of legislation from 1935. Since that time, the federal government, through the Department of Veterans Affairs, has responsibility for our veterans, including burial costs, so that's an obsolete piece of legislation that we're getting off the books.

Importantly also, the Hypnosis Act, admittedly an act that I haven't had a great deal of constituent contact about. The bill, from 1961, outlines who can perform hypnosis in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Thank you.

Mr Hudak: I didn't know the Hypnosis Act would generate that kind of discussion in the House, Mr Speaker. But as members may or may not know, it covers who can use that kind of treatment: doctors, dentists and psychiatrists. By repealing this act, we will allow other professions such as social workers to practice hypnosis. Importantly as well, once more, the Regulated Health Professions Act covers to make sure this type of care is appropriately given to patients across Ontario.

To summarize, we're building on work we have done to date: more drugs more quickly on the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary for patients across Ontario, especially for seniors; one-stop shopping for home care and placement for senior citizens; a streamlined hospital budget so people can dedicate their time to front-line patient care instead of all kinds of arcane rules, red tape and regulation.

I would say again, in conclusion, every hour spent filling out unnecessary forms, going through red tape, jumping through a lot of hoops is an hour not spent by our excellent health care practitioners across Ontario on patient care. That's why Bill 67 is very important, to make these changes so we can dedicate our resources to helping out the taxpayers of Ontario, the patients of Ontario, those who are putting money into the system, rather than concentrating our time on all kinds of red tape and regulation.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Gerard Kennedy (York South): I want to commend to some extent the ministry for bringing this forward, but of course recognize that it was June 6, 1996, when this bill first was brought forward. We certainly have to look at this in the context of everything else that has happened since.

The member was kind enough to remind us about the hours waiting and hours spent. We know that has mainly been transferred now to patients. Patients now have to wait for hours: hours waiting for ambulances; hours in emergency room hallways having to wait for health care; hours waiting trying to find out whether or not their family member will get surgery. In fact, that wait doesn't take hours; it takes days and weeks and months. MRIs in this province take a long, long time; that is, unless in Mike Harris's Ontario you own private insurance, in which case you have access to MRIs in the same hospitals, the

publicly funded machines. You can use them if you've bought this private insurance.

If this government really had the wellbeing of the health consumer in mind, if it really was prepared to look at what could make a health care system work in this province, those are the kind of waits that it would be attending to.

We appreciate that some of this may be bureaucracy that we don't need any more, and we're happy to support that element of it. But we do recognize in this, and will speak to it at greater length later, some of the inherent danger in where this government says it is going. When the member reminds us of hours wasted, we recognize that this is now generally being visited upon patients, on doctors who can't get operating rooms. We're wasting the talent that we've trained, that we've used on nurses, who are waiting to be able to get some of the skills and some of the equipment they need.

I would cite the case of Northwestern hospital, where people were served in emergency and equipment had to be sent over from another hospital in an ambulance and nurses had to be trained on the spot. That woman waited for almost four hours before she got proper medical care because that's Mike Harris's Ontario and that's health care in this province today. So when we look at this bill, we're sure to examine those elements of it as well.

Mr Kormos: I was critical of the member for Niagara South for just a couple of seconds for not sticking to the contents of Bill 67. I was wrong in having done that, because I understand that his scope is broader than just Bill 67.

I realized my error and I waited with anticipation because I realized he was canvassing a broad area and I was hoping he might have called for the Hotel Dieu Hospital to remain open in St Catharines. The dialysis unit there, which serves so many people in Niagara region, is so understaffed and under-resourced in its own right that people are forced to travel up to private facilities in Hamilton.

You know that, member for Niagara South. If only you had called for Hotel Dieu to remain open and not be shut down by your government's campaign to shut down hospitals across this province. You know how important Hotel Dieu is to the people of Thorold, because the people of Thorold rely upon Hotel Dieu as the hospital servicing their community. You know that. I was so dearly hoping you would stand up and, as a member of the Legislature and as the parliamentary assistant, call out for this government to keep Hotel Dieu open.

I was hoping that you might call out for this government to stop stacking district health councils with their appointees. You've heard the criticism that comes directly from the Niagara District Health Council. They are saying the government is avoiding the process; the government isn't going through the procedure of appointing people who were recommended by the head of the district health council. They are appointing Tory hacks who are prepared to do the hatchet job.

I think there is a quorum absent, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions or comments?

Mr Bob Wood (London South): The member spoke well.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for London South, do you have any questions or comments?

Mr Bob Wood: Yes, I did, sir, thank you. I just gave them.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments? You have two minutes to reply.

Mr Hudak: I anticipate support from both parties on this bill to clear away a lot of unnecessary red tape and regulation so we can devote resources to front-line care.

I appreciate the approach of the opposition parties that don't really want to talk about this bill in particular. They want to put their finger on any hot button they can find. That's how they define their role as opposition: to try to scare people, to try to frighten people, to grab some headlines. I know there are some contests that some of them will have to fight again, some of the members of their own party, to determine who is going to represent a particular riding in the next election, so it's important to get those headlines and to hit these hot buttons.

The fact of the matter is, I remember the other night being at a gathering for people with acquired brain injury, and the solemn commitment by this party and following through on that commitment to repatriate the individuals who have acquired brain injuries, who have had to go to the States in the past for that treatment, to bring them back home to Ontario to be closer to their families and to their natural support systems.

Up in Owen Sound last week, where we announced an opening for a new kidney dialysis clinic, a satellite, one woman gave a very impassioned speech. She thanked her family because they had had to take a three-and-a-half-hour trip to London three days a weeks for three hours of painful kidney dialysis procedure. Now, because of the reinvestments we're making, the tough decisions we're making, she will be able to have that service right there in Owen Sound near her home, after many years of driving a long distance down some difficult roads to London.

I know as well that by putting more money into cardiac surgery I will not have constituents, like I had just after I took office, who had to go to other countries for these procedures. We are going to put more money into cardiac care and cardiac surgery so they can get those operations quicker, and here in Ontario where we have the finest health care system in the world. That's what the issue is all about.

2150

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Kennedy: I'd like to split my time with the member from St Catharines.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Kennedy: We are here to look at the government's role in terms of health care. It wants to bring forward these various amendments to us under the guise that it has to do with housekeeping. But each of these items touches on some of the things that, since the introduction of this

bill, which the member for Niagara South spoke of as having vital importance, on June 6, 1996, show the difference between the rhetoric that comes out in terms of taking care of efficiencies and the actual doing of the business of government.

There are other things that have preoccupied this government. Some of them we're reminded of by the very elements in the bill: when we see, for example, reference made to the Ambulance Act and, for those members in Metro, understanding that their citizens were not well protected this week because ambulances had to be stretched to their absolute maximum to try to provide service. Why did they have to do that in Mike Harris's health system? They had to do that because the resources have been cut from hospitals, cut such that at noontime there were only five hospitals available with normal services, five out of all those available in Metro. Sixteen hospitals were either on a redirect status, meaning they couldn't take anything but the most severe cases, or on critical care bypass. What that means, for the people of Metropolitan Toronto, as people elsewhere in the province have already experienced, is that those hospitals couldn't take them even if they were in critical need.

We've heard reference by the Premier saying that's a system that is working. If that's a system working, then I think there are many, many people living in this Premier's Ontario who want it to change. If they have to change the government to do it, that's what they're prepared to do.

In Scarborough, three hospitals went on critical care bypass. That means there was not a single hospital in Scarborough available. We have members from Scarborough here tonight who have not spoken up in this House, who have not defended the need to be able to have emergency services in Scarborough sustained through whatever kind of irregular and erratic program of change this government may wish to do. It is sad, really, that we could have these alarm bells go off, that all the emergencies in Scarborough shut down, unable to take patients for an unreasonable period of time, critical care bypass at all three hospitals.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): What are you talking about?

Mr Kennedy: We have a question from one of the members from Scarborough, apparently not even aware that this was happening right in his own backyard, affecting the citizens he is here to represent.

When we look at the other elements of the act, we see similar things. When they talk about immunization and public health, we're reminded that those things are going to become academic from the standpoint of this government, because they have decided, in their abysmal haste to try to get rid of all manner of services, to download public health.

They're going to download it to municipalities unfamiliar with the legislative framework of that. They're going to make municipalities pay for public health in this province. They're going to make the property tax bear the cost of what every party has said at different times, and perhaps even the governing party in its more lucid moments: that preventive medicine is what we need if we're really about doing something for health care, not just shuffling a few papers differently. The number of papers that have been filled out requisitioning supplies, trying to get services and managing waiting lists in this province since the Harris government transformed the health system far outweigh any benefit we see in this bill before us. In fact, we see the public health system being dumped on municipalities. At the same time, municipalities won't be given enough money in the tradeoff that's happening to run public health.

What will happen to public health in this province? This government apparently is prepared to jettison some of the things that have brought us some of the most startling advances in terms of our ability to keep a healthy population.

We look at clean drinking water and at the kinds of things that happen in terms of inspection. We heard reference that it was redundant, but it reminds us that at the local level, that municipal government, deluged with the other competing needs — the potholes they're going to have to fix, the public housing they're going to have to repair, the kinds of needs that this government uniquely has carved out for them — will very likely be unable to meet the requirements under the Public Health Act. We will hear, I'm sure, at other times from this government that they will deal with that download in some circumspect way.

Tomorrow morning they'll have to deal with the Ontario Medical Association and hear from doctors in this province, not directly affected in terms of their income but very directly affected when they sense, I believe, a wrong direction on the part of this government, a real spiking of any chance for reform. What the parties have agreed is that not only is disease prevention important on its own, but it is the first step in having a truly effective health system. You deal with people in their early years, for example. You try to provide people with the basis to maintain health on their own. By delinking that, by disconnecting it from the existing health services, we ruin the chances, the possibilities, of being able to have this system in the future. Apparently, then, we see from this government where they're heading, where they would like to take our health system.

One of the most integrated systems we have right now is ambulances. Where is that going? It's being dumped. Again, it's being dumped on the municipalities, left to compete with all manner of other services. The fact is that hundred of millions of dollars of services will be pushed on to municipalities that they're going to have to find the money to pay for.

When this government speaks, as it tries to, about the wellbeing of people — and we heard from the member for Niagara South. We didn't hear him speaking about the hospitals at risk in his area, but we did hear him talking earnestly, and I think we want to credit him with that, about the need to preserve good-quality health for people. But we understand the contradiction. We understand what the people of Port Colborne and Fort Erie must have been

going through over these last few days as they look at the contradiction of the assurances they've received in the past from this government. They've got to wonder, "How do we reconcile what has been said, what has been printed and then what this government is actually doing?"

We've seen over the last few days that this government doesn't mean it when it comes to rural health care. They came up with a policy that purported to take special notice of some of those communities. Instead, when the hospital destruction commission, as it's popularly known, which goes around this province and has shut 24 hospitals so far, came to Lambton county and looked at Petrolia, did it apply what the minister said he would ensure was provided, a different kind of standard, one that really respected the kinds of needs that exist in rural areas? No, it didn't.

I'm sure it was to the shock and amazement of the people in Port Colborne and Fort Erie to learn that that piece of paper had no meaning when it came to what's actually going to happen to the hospitals in their area. Instead, the number of beds were set by the commission, and the commission decided using the same benchmarks they used in Sarnia, Toronto and Ottawa; they used those in Lambton county and Petrolia.

That meant we aren't going to have a real health care framework in this province. We're not going to be able to offer to people the chance to set health care priorities in this province, because that was what it promised to do. In fact, it explicitly said that a rural network of hospitals would decide the fate of these individual, single-hospital towns, that there was a chance of reprieve for some of the hospitals represented by some of the members opposite, that they might actually be able to sustain their care. Instead we find, as disappointing as it must be for the people who live in Fort Erie and Port Colborne and all manner of other places, in Grimsby, in Welland and all kinds of places that are depending on the outcomes of this decision, that they cannot depend on this government. This government has promulgated a policy that it can't enforce.

In fact, the head of the commission said this week that he's going to be visiting every single rural hospital in the province. That directly contradicts the assurances this government gave in its rural health care framework, where it said instead that local hospitals would be linked together and they would be making the decision. That's not what has happened. We haven't heard anything from the government side to explain the contradiction.

Who's in charge of health care? It has been apparent for some time. As we look at these regulations in Bill 67 and we see that many of them would take powers away from the Lieutenant Governor and the cabinet and would move those to the minister, that by itself gives great cause for concern, because the Minister of Health refuses to exercise powers in the public interest. He refused to act on behalf of Montfort, he refused to act on behalf of Women's College Hospital, he has refused to act on behalf of Port Colborne and Fort Erie, of the hospitals in St Mary's and Kitchener. He has refused to act to try to inject policy that really reflects community needs. Instead we have a government that plainly forgot what communities require, that they require an approach that can be tailored to their individual communities and not some cookie-cutter bunch of formulas, which is what this government has set loose. So we see an acute disappointment on the part of many, many people in this province as they start to become alert to the fact that this reprieve in rural health care policy doesn't mean that.

They understand too that there's some selectivity going on here. Burk's Falls, represented very ably by the Minister of Finance, is the only place in the province to have a hospital opened in the last few years. It's not visited by the hospital restructuring or destructuring commission. In fact, it's not subject to any of the normal processes we know. We don't even know if the Minister of Health knew that the Minister of Finance opened a rural hospital in his area.

2200

None of that, unfortunately, bothers the individuals in this House who represent the other hospitals that have been slated for closing, in Grimsby and other places across the province. It is sad indeed to see that the members opposite have abandoned rural hospitals, have said that we can't afford to sustain good quality health care. It is sad to see the number of things, the long lineup of things that each member of the government can conscience being put ahead of the basic needs of this province, and say instead: "We have a tax cut on one hand, a fistful of money for a certain number of people, and on the other hand we're prepared to close hospitals even when it can't be justified from a health or social or economic standpoint. We're prepared to do that."

We learned today just how sadly and how far off the trail this government is when it comes to any reasonable amount of health care.

Mr Tom Froese (St Catharines-Brock): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: The member for Niagara South introduced the bill to cut red tape and duplication. The member should follow suit and cut his speech and talk about the bill instead of everything else.

The Deputy Speaker: He's right on topic.

Mr Kennedy: We understand that the member for St Catharines-Brock would not want us to talk about what's happening in his area. The closure of Hotel Dieu is on the boards there. Probably the same thing that happened in Sarnia is going to happen to your community, thanks to your government. They are going to cut 30% of the funding.

We're sitting here a year and a half later looking at this bill. We have to look at what your government has done. Should we trust you to implement even these apparently innocuous measures? I say to the members of your riding, who are going to be less well served in the future, that 30% of the beds left Sarnia; $18 million a year being taken away, that's what's happening and that's what's coming to a neighbourhood near you. I can understand how the member for St Catharines-Brock was not anxious to have those kinds of views aired.

We've seen time and time again how the members of the government would like to see debate stifled. We've

seen this week alone, in terms of Bill 160, how the future of education in this province can be cavalierly subjected to a time limitation, can be put in a place where most of the province won't even have a chance to understand what 272 pages of aggrandizing power means, taking $6 billion worth of property taxes and setting them, around the cabinet table, in whatever manner they see fit. It's unprecedented in this province, and it's happening in health care.

When we see the download of public health particularly, we know there's an abandonment of any kind of plan to try and put together a proper, decent health care system in this province. We see that reinforced, because also mentioned in this bill is the Homemakers and Nurses Services Act. That's where each member of this government has to hang their head in shame, because we see the repeated attacks on nursing in this province as nothing less than absolute callousness in terms of where the government is going. We are losing professionals to other professions because they are out of work, we're losing them to the United States, and we're doing that because this government doesn't believe in high-quality care. They have forced hospitals, by cutting them by a huge amount of money —

The Deputy Speaker: Order, members. If you want to hold conversations, I would ask you to do it outside, not in the House, please.

Mr Kennedy: It is of course difficult to get any of the government members' attention when it comes to the plight of nurses in this province. The homemakers and nurses find themselves not just ignored — that isn't good enough for this government — but instead they are under attack.

We looked at each of these members — we have 45 communities in this House, for example, served by the Red Cross. The Red Cross, the VON, the St Elizabeth nurses are all under attack by this government. They are subjecting those agencies that have provided home care to some phoney-baloney request for proposals that will help to privatize home care in this province. I say phoney-baloney because those regulations have not been put in front of us; the quality of home care has not been put forward. Instead, we know that two years from now all the business will be stripped away from those individual agencies. They will be forced to compete with private companies which are moving into this province, encouraged, we believe, by this government, because it is out to provide health care on the cheap.

We know that kind of health care is the type they believe they can get away with, because who is to tell when you've closed a hospital bed? It's very apropos of these regulations to understand the big picture of this government. They are not closing hospital beds that are empty. That's what other governments did; that was too reasonable. Instead, this government is closing beds which have people in them. We see this government adopting a very suspect approach called "quicker and sicker." People leave their hospital beds quicker and sicker, and then they're served by whatever service happens to be available. That means home care, where it exists, where it hasn't been cut back — like it's been cut back in Hamilton, in Kitchener-Waterloo where the hours have been trimmed, actually taken away from disabled people — is going to be subject to lower standards. Under the RFP process, we are not seeing high standards maintained.

The lack of commitment on the part of this government to home care is such that we went through a whole year of this government knowing about the pay equity provisions affecting the Red Cross. The Minister of Health sat in his place time after time and refused to answer a single question about the future of 73,000 people depending on home care services. Some 73,000 frail elderly and/or disabled people couldn't draw this minister to his feet.

That is why we have to pay particular attention to the kind of amendments happening here today, because they are part of the overall picture. They are part of a disdain for public health care which is certainly starting to take active shape in this province.

We look at the Homemakers and Nurses Services Act and we wonder when the dumping of people is taking place. I use that word very carefully. We have a minister who called the people taking up chronic care beds in this province bed-blockers, people who get in the way; not people in need, not people who deserve services, but bed-blockers. Instead, those people deserve to be accorded proper quality care, whether it's home care, if we can make that work according to standard — and there are many good agencies that can do exactly that with the proper support. Instead of doing that, instead of also making sure we have standards in our nursing homes, in our homes for the aged, both of which are part of this bill, we've decided to cut the standards. We've removed the requirement to have a registered nurse in the nursing homes. We've cut the mandatory number of hours that are required.

That's the real direction of this government in health care. That's how this bill has to be looked at, as a Harris health care system that is trying to pay for the tax cut by taking health care away from people. We see that in the dropping of standards in nursing homes. We've heard about psychogeriatric wards that have had to lock their doors because they don't have enough people to look after the needs of patients. In this House, we have tabled cases of people in hospitals who have been tied to their chairs by nurses run off their feet, unable to provide and keep them safe in any other manner. We've received correspondence from people who are shocked that their parents have lost weight in hospitals, because the nurses are so busy that all they can do is put food in front of people; they can't help them eat to stay healthy, to meet the fundamental requirements of the health system, but instead have the food taken away when it has not even been consumed. Those people, rather than sustaining health, have been unable to maintain health.

We also look at the provisions in this bill that speak to the Ontario Mental Health Foundation Act. We're reminded that this is a government that can't learn. This is a government often reputed to be unable to listen, unable

to take account of what the community is experiencing, but certainly now we know this is a government that cannot learn from the experiences of the past. In the 1970s, deinstitutionalization of mental health facilities took place on a very large scale. That should have been enough to give any government of any stripe pause before entering into any further changes without having a rock-steady plan of how people could be integrated into the community.

The evidence of that flawed plan and that flawed integration of people with mental health problems is to be found today under bridges. It's to be found today in shelters. It's to be found today in rooming-houses and basements, where people take welfare cheques and then stack people with mental disabilities like cordwood in those awful, awful facilities. That's the quality of life that emerges when we don't take due care.

That's exactly what we're headed for again unless this government can be brought to terms.

2210

Mr Jim Flaherty (Durham Centre): You don't know what you're talking about.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Durham Centre.

Mr Kennedy: This government opened a new facility in Whitby, and it took them so long to make that available.

Mr Flaherty: A magnificent facility.

The Deputy Speaker: It's the last time I advise you — the last time.

Mr Kennedy: We look at the very same thing happening in terms of Durham region. We look at the amount of money that's being taken away, even from our fastest-growing areas.

Mr Flaherty: Why don't you visit it? You might learn something.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I don't want to warn you again. Please.

Mr Kennedy: It is disturbing, I'm sure, to the members from Durham and Oshawa and others in this House to learn how much money their hospitals have lost, to learn that even if the population is going up, and — something not unique to their areas but to the whole province — even if the population is getting older, they're still having money taken away, an average of 12% in the last two years. That's an incredible amount of money: $800 million taken away from hospitals.

That answers most of the questions about the problems being experienced today, about why we had 20 people in the hallway in Peterborough and why the daughter of one of them was the only one who found that her father had died: Ed Whitehead, 82 years old, his first time in the hospital in 40 years. The answer to that, sadly, is that we don't value that system enough to make sure it's funded, to put the burden of proof and the burden of error on the transition by the government rather than on the health care professionals, on the nurses, on the doctors, on the hospitals that are struggling to provide the service, and upon the patients.

When we look at some of the written word this government wants to depend on, we're reminded that earlier this year they had a report. This health minister commissioned a report to look at what the real impact would be of taking money out. We hasten to say that this report was authorized one year after the reductions were already under way, but the government made an attempt to say, "What would happen if we take $1.3 billion out of hospitals?" When they looked at that, when they applied it in their biggest theoretical model they could put together with the most aggressive — and these are the words being used, unfortunately, in the health ministry and the health care community: "aggressive models of savings." But even with those most aggressive models, we found in this report that the government knew ahead of time it could not take the money out of hospitals without hurting patients.

In fact, in each and every year this Ministry of Health study documented how much pain there would be: $216 million the first year, rising to $450 million the second year, almost $600 million, which could not be saved by economies, could not be saved by administrative efficiencies, could not be saved even by pushing people out of hospital quicker and sicker. That's what we find today, that that overhang is being visited on the families and the individuals needing health care in this province. It's sad, truly sad to see a government unable to get in touch with the realities of health care in this province today.

That's why I believe we have before us this bill, this purportedly housekeeping administrative bill, which says it would address some of the things to make things easier, and we've seen how long it's taken. Yet what did this government do months and weeks after coming into office? It cut hospitals by $1.3 billion immediately. It cut $100 million the first year and we're up to $800 million cumulatively right now. That caused no pause on the part of this government, so quick to hurt and so slow to provide support.

This government and many of its members, I believe, feel a bit beleaguered. They feel they're unfairly called to task for the things that happen in this province, and I can understand that in the sense that they have many things to be called to account for. But hopefully they will look at the period we're in now as a unique opportunity to not blow it altogether, to not ruin the health care system.

That must be somewhere on the agenda, because we have in front of us a financial review of all 192 public hospitals in this province, uniquely done not by some political party, not by some health advocate, but by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. In this financial review the bank examined the financial health of our hospitals. Shockingly, this government would have our hospitals rack up deficits in the order of $120 million this year to help pay for its tax cuts, to have hospitals rack up that kind of debt just so they can provide basic health care services. Shame on you. Shame on you to allow that to happen.

We've heard members of this government pretend that — I have to believe they were sincere at the time. Perhaps it's taken time for them to appreciate that there are two different features of health care policy in this province.

One is the cuts. They happen right away, they happen immediately; when this government wants to take away money, that's for certain. We've lost over $800 million without equivocation, without hesitation, even in the face of all manner of stop signs and road bumps and alarm bells. But when it comes to promises to put money back in, that takes much longer.

Last year, in the quicker and sicker Ontario of Mike Harris, what happened in terms of long-term care, in terms of home care? Was more money spent when this government was busy hurting hospitals and taking money away and forcing them to release patients earlier? Did they put money back into those long-term-care facilities, those nursing homes? Did they give money to health care in terms of the home? No. Even though they budgeted, promised $120 million more, they actually managed to spend $4 million less. It's right there in the estimates. It's absolutely clear what this government means. Those are the bottom lines we have to pay attention to.

It's the same thing for community mental health. When we talk about deinstitutionalization, closing psychiatric beds, we've heard promises to put money into the community to fund some of the community agencies that could make a difference and integrate people into the community, that could make people less afraid of people with mental disabilities, that could solve some of the problems we see. Well, $25 million was promised, but none of it was spent; $1 million less was spent on community mental health programs last fiscal year than the year before, $26 million less than what was promised.

We must pay close attention when the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce tells us clearly that the net loss to hospitals of any reinvestment that's happened for any programs, for cardiac programs that should have been funded anyway, for other programs that were promised by other governments, for any of those things, is still $604 million. Those are the facts.

We hope there might be some prospect of this government coming to terms with facts. It's difficult for it to do. But we recognize that when it comes to health care there may be a chance. There may be a prospect, a possibility that this government doesn't want, at least in terms of its entire membership, to be known as the government that brought down public health care in this country.

We'll know if they let this period pass, if they let the alarm bells of the emergency rooms that are closed in Metro pass, if they let pass the CIBC report that says, "You're bankrupting some of the hospitals" — that's their language, not mine — if they ignore the report that looked at the core of their business with health care in this province, that said: "How is the change taking place? Can you trust Mike Harris's Tories to make change? Did they know what they were doing when they did that?"

Hon Al Leach (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Yes.

Mr Kennedy: We hear the member representing at least one of the hospitals to be closed saying, "Yes." Sadly, that is the conviction that passes for fact and opinion on the other side of this House.

The Ivey school of business conducted in-depth interviews with 400 people on the front lines, a process we recommend to every member of this House in terms of getting a chance at having a proper perspective on health care in this province. Four hundred people on the front lines of health care told them the same story, told them that the changes being done in the hospitals are being done at the expense of patients. They're being done at a lower quality of food. They're being done at a lower standard of cleanliness. They're being done at fewer nursing hours per patient. That's how the comic book revolution is getting paid for, the comic book revolution that says, "You can have your cake and eat it too." That 21 pages with pictures doesn't really have the answers with health care.

There is no mystery to it. This report makes it absolutely clear. It calls for some real common sense. It says to this government, "You have to stop." The Ivey school of business says its study of the 12 best-performing hospitals in this province in terms of dealing with change forms the basis to say it can't be done.

You must stop. You must stop the closing of hospitals, the cutting of hospitals in East York, the closing of hospitals in the Niagara region. You must stop and take a pause in the restructuring, because the hospitals are being required to fire some of the very people they need to do change successfully. They can't collect the data to know the kind of harm that's happening. They don't have the people in place to make the adjustments. We don't have the nurses to deliver the care to the people who are being readmitted into hospital. They're coming back because they needed the care in the first place. The quicker and sicker wish of this government that somehow they could make sick people go away is badly out of sync not only with reality but with the deep-down desires of the people in this province, who believe in a public health care system, who would see one sustained, not disdained the way it is by this government.

2220

We know as well that this act is to touch on the Private Hospitals Act. It seems innocuous enough. The act says that we'll remove a $10 application fee, that we'll take that out of there. Instead we need to look at that $10 application fee in the context of the overall approach this government has taken. The overall approach this government has taken is to make private companies have access to the health care system. It has encouraged in all manner of ways the takeover of laboratories, of laboratory services. It is now looking, we believe, at the wholesale privatization of whole parts of the health care system in this province.

This is not by accident. Each one of the members on the other side of this House has had the opportunity, if they got within 10 feet of their constituency office, to have heard from somebody who's suffered in terms of health care in this province, who's part of those longer waiting lists, who's tried to get an MRI, who's spent time in emergency, who maybe in the Niagara region had to try four different hospitals before they found someone who would actually accept the ambulance. They've heard this.

How are we to conclude about the intentions of this government? How are we to know what the member from Etobicoke north really has in mind in terms of the cuts his hospital has suffered? How do we know whether this is part of their plan?

It's fairly clear because the Fraser Institute and a number of other places have asked for exactly what this government is delivering. What they've asked for is what the members of this government, unfortunately, don't have the courage to tell the people of Ontario it's what they're really about. What the Fraser Institute has been asking for, for three years — the multimillion-dollar program — is a very simple formula. They say: "Strip down the public hospital system. Do it emphatically. Take the services out of those hospitals and give us the basis for a two-tier health care system."

As we witness the loss of some of our most special community-based hospitals, some of our unique teaching hospitals — we're graced tonight by the presence of the minister responsible for women's issues and I'm sure she will take the time to comment on the prospective loss of Women's College Hospital, of the idea of a women-centred hospital taking place in this province, which with perhaps a breadth of perspective that unfortunately the cabinet as a whole was not able to muster — we know, we heard earlier, for example, about the minister in charge of municipalities, the member for St George-St David, saying he couldn't intervene at cabinet on behalf of the hospitals in his riding. That couldn't be done. Instead he wrote a letter. He couldn't do that.

We couldn't get a cabinet policy. Tomorrow in his riding, and I assume he'll be there, they'll be discussing an urban health policy at Wellesley. Had the member for St George-St David been fully sincere about heading off the effects of this hospital destruction commission, he would've had an urban health policy passed at cabinet, because that would've made possible the sustenance of what Women's College is doing, of what Wellesley is doing, of what the Doctors Hospital is doing in terms of serving multicultural populations.

There are choices that are being made. These choices are being made by this government. We know — the minister responsible for women's issues will tell us as well — why the hospitals in London, some of the best run, by reputation, in this province, are having to rack up deficits for the first time in their existence. They are having to rack up deficits. When the minister visited their town and said, "You can have $133 million," they didn't realize those were Harris dollars. That's in money you can't take to the bank. For this year we're not going to spend even 15%; it's right in the estimates. The restructuring dollars are supposed to be $1.3 billion, but when it comes to cash basis, to the money available to fix hospitals, the money available to do that is only $217 million.

There's no way London will receive $133 million — the perspective for the people of London, who must wonder: "How does this square with what we're hearing from the hospital administrator about having to run a deficit? How does it square with people who are having trouble finding beds because the beds are all full in London? How does this square with the story that's coming from the government? How could this possibly square?" The reality is that hospital system is losing $55 million a year. In less than three years, that city, that community — of course because of its very specialized and excellent hospital services, it will be a blow to the whole region — will lose $55 million a year in health care services.

We know that over a proper transition period, with a government prepared to take time and care and do it with regard and attention for the impact on people, this might be able to be done, but this is not that government because this government has made choices. They present us with some of them here today when they talk to us about what they'd like to do in terms of the health promotion act and the Homemakers and Nurses Services Act, but we know the real agenda has to be creating two-tier health care. The only thing that makes sense of the myriad ways this government has chosen to attack the health care system — to draw money out for its tax cut, is if this government is truly bent on creating two-tier health care here.

Sadly, as I mentioned very briefly before, some of that is already with us. Some of that we already see. We haven't heard a single member opposite call upon their government to say, "It's not right when a 53-year-old accountant or a 35-year-old firefighter who's had an injury in the line of duty, when both of them have to wait up to six months for an MRI in this province, and yet a member of a professional sports team can get an MRI the next day."

The point is that Buffalo has 24 MRIs. Even the maritime provinces have two MRIs, more per population than we have here. The staffing: Even the maritime provinces pay for those MRIs; they pay the full cost. In this increasingly two-tier province under the Harris government, we pay only $150,000 a year, less than one-quarter of the cost of operating the MRIs.

We have seen the deliberate development — one has to now conclude that this is deliberate on the part of this government — to create a difference between what has been a cherished Canadian value, one that, as people face the risk of not having it, they appreciate even more, the idea that no matter what station of life people come from, they're still going to receive good quality health care.

Interjections.

Mr Kennedy: Unfortunately, as the various reports have told us, that's not what's available in the front lines. Some of the members opposite seem to take objection, but they obviously haven't taken the time to read the reports we now have, the reports not on past governments, but on their government, the reports by the Ivey school of business in London which has said what a mess they're making of change in hospitals; the financial review by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce which says how they're bankrupting some of our hospital corporations in this province; the reports done by the Ministry of Health which say that the emergency service in Windsor has been

made unsafe by the cuts this government has done and the amalgamations they've forced ahead of their time.

In conclusion, we wish to encourage this government to get a better grip on reality. We want it to move away from, and perhaps beyond, and put into place whatever efficiencies they think they can do. I hope today we're able to give this government fair warning that even the most innocuous of this government's measures can come out in a way that can harm patients because we have no one minding the store when it comes to health care by the Harris government.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I really appreciate the remarks of the member for York South, Mr Kennedy, because he managed to provoke a number of interjections from the opposition, which indicates clearly to me that he was hitting home with the remarks he made. He's done extensive research into this situation in health care in the province, he's highly respected among the health care community, and certainly among those who are the recipients of health care and who are the patients in the province. I know that when he has this kind of speech delivered in this Legislature, he even has the member for Etobicoke-Humber interjecting from somewhere other than his own seat, which means he has them completely exercised.

I know that Kim Rupcic — who is watching us this evening — and Lillian Howe are people who are very concerned about the health care system and the substantial changes taking place, which are not to the benefit of patients in this province. This bill, which deals with health care — it's a so-called red tape bill — should take into account the fact that the government appears to be moving towards the privatization of health care in Ontario.

2230

One thing about which most Ontarians have been particularly pleased and proud over the years, regardless of their political affiliations, except perhaps the Reform Party that is in power in Ontario now, is the publicly funded and excellently operated health care system in this province, established a number of years ago under a Conservative regime, carried on under Liberal and NDP regimes. It is something of which we are justifiably proud.

I know our American friends — not necessarily those who make a lot of money from the health care system, but those who are patients in the United States — look upon us with envy, particularly the middle class and people with lower incomes. The rich people in the US can get whatever kind of health care they want. All you have to do is have the bucks in the US and you go to the front of the line, you get the best of doctors, the best of facilities, whereas in Ontario, by and large, that is not the case. In Ontario we have a circumstance where people of all backgrounds can receive the kind of health care that we think it is important for them to have.

I am concerned about the privatization. I think secretly, many of the Reform-a-Tories who sit on the other side of the House, the really right-wing members of the government caucus, believe in the privatization of health care, believe that the kind of health care a person gets should depend on how much money that person has in the wallet or in the bank account and not on that person's need. I reject that completely.

There are those who want a lot of user fees in the system, despite the fact that Premier Harris, when he was in opposition, said, "Look, a user fee is a tax." He was very much opposed to user fees, although when he was contesting the leadership with Dianne Cunningham, the member for London North, he started to edge into the idea that perhaps user fees might be all right. Well, again, the user fee penalizes people of modest income and modest needs.

It seems to me that now we have a situation where the government wants more and more user fees. They want to force seniors in this province to pay fees for prescriptions. Seniors who have worked so hard on behalf of the people of this province and made their contribution are now being asked to pay fees for their prescriptions when they are very often struggling to make ends meet, particularly when they find out that there is going to be an end to rent control in the province, that the Harris government has ended rent control. All of those seniors who live in rental accommodation will now be trapped in that accommodation, because if they move out, they lose the rent control protection they have at the present time.

I look at the closing of hospitals related to this bill. The Premier, you will recall, Mr Speaker — I know you would have watched the debate between the three leaders during the last election campaign, May 1995. I remember Robert Fisher of Global TV, who was one of the panellists, directed a question to Mike Harris, the leader of the Conservative Party, because Mike Harris had talked about some changes in the health care system. He asked him, was this going to cause the closing of hospitals? Let me quote you exactly what the Premier said. His exact words — I've memorized them — were the following: "I can guarantee you, Robert, it is not my plan to close hospitals." That was a guarantee, an ironclad guarantee he would not close hospitals. Now we have hospitals closing all over the province when he is the Premier of this province. I call that a broken promise. I like to hear the Conservatives get up and say, "Oh we kept all these promises." A very important one, not to close any hospitals, is being broken.

Our local hospital restructuring committee, or, as some people call it, the hospital closing committee, established by the Niagara District Health Council — you've had the same in Ottawa except you've had the provincial restructuring committee — in the Niagara Peninsula was faced with circumstances that said the province is going to take $44 million out of the operating budgets of the hospitals in the Niagara region. Faced with that dilemma, faced with that cut in hospital funding for operating purposes, the committee said, "It looks like we're going to have to close or severely alter the hospitals and their role." So in Fort Erie, they had, what, 4,000 people out.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: The member for Niagara South is saying, "No, it wasn't that many," but I think he knows there were

a lot of people there, over 4,000, I'd say. That's that count I had. Then they went to Port Colborne. Over 3,000 people, I'm told, showed up in Port Colborne to protect the local hospital: Douglas Memorial Hospital in Fort Erie and the Port Colborne hospital. People had contributed to that hospital over the years. They felt a need for it, and they were right. They remembered Mike Harris during the campaign saying it was not his plan to close hospitals.

Then they went out to Grimsby. They had probably 12,000 people out one night in Grimsby saying, "Don't close the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital." I know my friend the member for Lincoln would have noted the large number of people who were out there. Certainly they called me. I expressed my strong support and I assured them. I said: "Look, don't worry. Mike Harris said it is not his plan to close hospitals, so you don't have to worry."

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, they wanted to close the hospital there as well.

In St Catherines, the Hotel Dieu Hospital, which this year is celebrating its 50th anniversary, was going to fall under the axe. I remember there was a letter read out last Friday by my friend from St Catharines-Brock, from the Premier, giving greetings on the 50th anniversary. You know how he ended it up? He said, "On this day and for the many years to come." Well, I was encouraged by that, because that means that Mike Harris, I guess, is not going to allow Hotel Dieu Hospital in St Catharines to close. At least that's the way I interpret it.

In our community we need all the hospitals. The St Catharines General Hospital has delivered outstanding service over the years to people of our community. The Shaver Hospital, which is a chronic care hospital at this time and once served people with tuberculosis, has served us extremely well in our community. The Niagara Peninsula Rehabilitation Centre adjacent to the Shaver Hospital provides an outstanding service. Our people don't want any of those gone.

Now, maybe the member for Etobicoke-Humber, a member of the Reform-a-Tory party, thinks that we should be closing hospitals. Well, the people in St Catharines don't agree with that, I can assure you. I stood on the steps of the Hotel Dieu Hospital, shoulder to shoulder with those who want to keep that hospital open and continuing to operate for many years to come, just as I stood shoulder to shoulder with the people at the General and the Shaver Hospital who want to see those hospitals open.

Do you know what's happening now? Exactly what the government wants to happen. They want everybody to fight with one another. So now we have the friction in the community, one hospital saying that if a hospital has to close, it should be the other hospital. That's most unfortunate.

There was a game people played when they were children called pin the tail on the donkey. Well, the donkey in this case is in the Premier's office, and I don't mean to call the Premier a donkey. I'm not making a disparaging remark, but if you look at the object of the children's game, it was called pin the tail on the donkey. I did not use the language the member for Brampton North used earlier this evening, because I was shocked by that and I think he's been chastised now by the family values coalition within the Conservative caucus. They have taken him out and explained to him that that language is simply not acceptable, and I don't blame them.

The closing of hospitals in this health care bill we are very concerned about. I will stand shoulder to shoulder with all of the people in the Niagara Peninsula who face the axe of the provincial government.

Why is that happening? Because of an ill-conceived tax promise, a 30% tax cut that benefits the richest people in our society the most. When you have a balanced budget, that makes sense, but when you don't have a balanced budget, I have small-c conservatives coming to me saying, "Why would you possibly have a tax cut," and that affects all legislation, "when you have to borrow money and increase the provincial debt in order to give the money to the rich?"

2240

The Deputy Speaker: Get back to the topic, please.

Mr Bradley: Back to the topic of hospitals again.

Interjections.

Mr Bradley: Well, it is. See? As soon as I mention something that's embarrassing to the government, there's all kinds of barracking from the other side. I could mention the Minister's Round Table on Technology in Learning, chaired by the minister, the Honourable John C. Snobelen, on which the facilitator was Terry Miller of the Cooke Miller consulting company of Rochester, New York: an American company coming in and doing this. This was a secret document. They had them coming in to advise us on our education system. I won't mention that, Mr Speaker, because you want me to stay with the bill.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am very much awake, and I know that you are not on topic. If you don't stop continuing on the same topic, I'll have to stop you.

Mr Bradley: I'll get back to health care and the many promises of the Premier.

I want to know why there was not a provision in this bill cancelling the downloading of ambulance services to municipalities. They had a lot of trouble with it in Ottawa-Carleton in health care. In our area, I'm concerned that we're going to have Rural/Metro running the whole province. As soon as they heard there was downloading to the municipalities of this health care service, they were lining up at the border. The lineup was way back. They want to come in and provide this service. I can tell you that just across the border, in northern New York state, it costs about seven times as much to have an ambulance ride as it does in Ontario.

If this were truly a bill which was going to facilitate the cutting of red tape, it would have cut the red tape that's going to result from the fact that there is ambulance service being dumped on municipalities and in the private sector. I think the people who provide many of the ambulance services today are doing a good job. Municipalities

shouldn't be stuck with that responsibility, and you're dumping it on them. That is wrong.

Let me now look at the ramifications. I heard the parliamentary assistant say something this evening about the hospitals making it easier to report now. What they would have to report are huge deficits because you have cut funding so much. People who have been in the hospital or know others who have been in the hospital lately will tell you that the kind of service you used to get in a hospital 10 years ago is simply not available today. It has deteriorated considerably. Is it because of the workers there? No. They're as dedicated as ever. They're hard-working and dedicated. Is it because the hospital wants to provide less service? Absolutely not. It's because this government has withdrawn, has slashed so much of the funding for the operation of hospitals that you don't have the same kind of care today. I defy any government member to tell me something different. It just doesn't happen.

Day after day I get telephone calls and letters at my constituency office — some in the Toronto office, but most at the constituency office — talking about the kind of care available today in hospitals. They will invariably say that the people working there do a good job; the nurses, the doctors, the orderlies, the people who help out in every way do a good job. However, they are not getting the money from the provincial government. Because — and you were wondering, Mr Speaker, how the tax cut entered into this — the government has implemented a 30% income tax cut, they've had to slash far more and far deeper than they had ever anticipated. That is why our hospital care is not what it was 10 years ago.

They'll try to intimidate them. They say to the hospital administrators and the local district health councils: "Well, you people better be quiet or you could be next. You watch, we control the budget." So people who normally would be speaking out vociferously are intimidated sometimes by the provincial government. That's most unfortunate, because we urge them to speak up.

I remember that even when the previous Liberal government was in power and the hospitals were adequately funded, they wanted to have some additional funding. So the hospital system was built up and the expansion had begun in the home care system.

I'm concerned, for instance, when I hear that the Red Cross workers who provide home care and housekeeping and so on, all kinds of services in the home, have been placed in a vulnerable position. I hope that has been solved, because I want to speak on behalf of those home care people.

I know that in Toronto — and it's not only in Toronto — you run into what's called "critical bypass." What does that mean? That means that hospitals are unable to accept ambulances showing up at their door because they're full, because they're too busy, because there aren't any beds in those hospitals. If you're going to cut hospitals, if you keep closing hospitals the way you're doing now, what happens is that you get into critical bypass. So there are a lot of people saying: "We wish the hospital system was the way it was six or seven or eight years ago, because it was in good shape then, it was well funded then. People had jobs in that hospital system. We didn't have 15,000 nurses losing their jobs." That is what we are confronting in our system today.

I want to commend our city council, which on two occasions passed resolutions — not always unanimously, but passed resolutions — asking that all of our hospitals be kept open. Now, some people who perhaps like Mike Harris very much and his policy may not have agreed, but the majority of city council agreed with that and passed that motion to keep all of our hospitals open. I want to commend the mover of that motion, councillor Bruce Williamson, who moved that motion that they support all of the hospitals in St Catharines to keep them open.

In the context of all of this, in the context of this bill, what is the government doing now to ensure that its message gets out? Well, you would be aware, Mr Speaker, as well as anybody else that they spent millions of dollars on an advertising campaign. That's taxpayers' dollars. That's not Conservative Party funds; that's something different. This is government tax dollars, tax dollars from everyone in the province spent to purvey political propaganda, just as they're doing in the education matter as well. On the health care issue, you will recall those advertisements that were out there concerning health care in the province, extolling the virtues of the health care system while it was falling apart, while they were dismantling it, while they were making it into a two-tier system.

We also have — this is news to you, Mr Speaker. Probably because of what's happening in the health care system, probably because of the bad publicity the government is getting, they have now seconded Ab Campion from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations to the Premier's office — I hear that; I don't know if it's true yet or not — to come from CCR, Consumer and Commercial Relations, to put a new spin on the government message of health care and other fields.

You would know as well that the government, as of October 1, established a new news service which allows the government to bypass the press gallery. We all know the press gallery is independent-minded, digging all the time and so on when they cover health care issues. What's going to happen now is that the government will simply issue its press releases on some computer, on some system that bypasses those who know the issues here in the press gallery.

What else are they doing so that health care can't be covered as well as we would like? They're trying to shove the members of the press gallery up to the fifth floor, to the attic of this building, so they won't have easy access to opposition members who may be able to draw important issues to their attention. So we see all of this happening.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: My friend the member from Humber wants me to mention Conrad Black. I would say that it's hard to get Conrad Black into such a speech other than to say that the newspapers owned by Conrad Black are moving towards supporting a health care system — notice

I said "health care" — which is in fact a privatization of the system and a two-tier system. They support the cuts, because many of their editorial writers come from the Fraser Institute or from Mike Harris's office or from Preston Manning's office.

I think my colleague from York South and I have outlined very extensively for members of the government our concerns about this particular piece of legislation. I thank members for their kind attention and interjections.

2250

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre): I want to rise and commend the always interesting speeches of the member for St Catharines, and today was no exception. As my leader, Howard Hampton, said earlier, his ability to segue from one issue to the next and still stay within the radar screen of the issue at hand is truly a talent and one that a lot of us are watching and trying to learn to copy, because it's definitely a finely honed skill.

Anybody who listens to the speeches of the member for St Catharines will realize that he understands politics at the local level if not better, certainly as well as anyone in this Legislature, and not just his own community. Whether he is supporting an issue or shooting a well-placed witticism across the floor, he understands what is happening in each of our communities at the grass roots where it matters. So it's not unusual that he would commend his local council for passing a resolution or a motion supporting the keeping of all their hospitals.

He will know that in Hamilton-Wentworth we went through a very similar exercise. I've heard him comment on this before. Like him, I have offered up the commendation and support and compliments to our local council, in particular the regional chairman, Terry Cooke, who led the fight to turn around an initial task force recommendation that would have attempted to close St Joseph's Hospital in the heart of downtown Hamilton. There was such an explosion that chairman Cooke pulled together a group of academics, scientists, doctors and community people and offered up an alternative program that allowed us to make the savings, albeit they need to be reinvested back into the health care system, and also saved all our hospitals. The government's commission, however, is planning at this stage to shut down that one or maybe another one yet.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener): It's always a pleasure to listen to the member for St Catharines. I wish I could say the same about the member for York South. The member for York South, the health critic for the Liberal Party, the opposition party, constantly talks about health cuts by the government. I have spoken in the estimates committee many, many times. I have asked him to come forward and explain these health cuts that the government is supposedly making.

The facts are that we have increased health care spending from $17.4 billion when we came to power two years ago to $17.8 billion in program spending alone this year. In fact, the total health care spending is $18.5 billion.

The health critic also never wants to come clean as to how the Liberal government, the Liberal Party, would have restricted the balancing of the budget to four years whereas we increased it to five.

Mr Bradley: No tax cuts.

Mr Wettlaufer: Oh, I love that answer. The member for St Catharines says, "No tax cuts." That's wonderful, because the leader of the Liberal Party said as recently as this summer that he would not eliminate the tax cuts. He now believes the public in Ontario wants it and believes in it.

Today there was an article in the Globe and Mail. Do you know that in the United States they have had lots of examples, in the 1920s, the 1960s and the 1980s, of tax reductions accompanying an increase in tax revenues to the government? That's exactly what has happened here in Ontario.

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): It's always a pleasure to comment on the comments made by the member for St Catharines as well as the member for York South. I think both of these members have pointed out very well the erosion of the health care system here in Ontario.

When you hear the member for Kitchener get up and say that it's not happening, he like a lot of his colleagues is not listening to the front-line workers. I come in here day after day, after listening to teachers, after listening to nurses and after listening to people who are delivering the services on the front line — the member for St Catharines has pointed that out — and these members will talk about increases in budgets, the money flowing. But then when you go back home, when I go back to my constituency, I talk to these folks on the front line and I ask them, "Is that what you see?" They say: "No. How can we actually see increases in budgets when we're down nurses, when we can't provide the front-line care that is needed?" The member for St Catharines points that out very well.

As well, we are looking at a system, as the member for St Catharines mentioned, that is going to be going two ways: one for the people who can afford to pay for their health care and another system for the rest of the public, the rest of the folks out there. So again, a system that we've always been very proud of is breaking down and going in two different directions: for those who can afford it and for those who can't.

As well, the member for St Catharines brings the Premier back to that famous quote he made when Robert Fisher asked him about closing hospitals. We've all seen it played a number of times. He told Robert Fisher that it was not in his plan to close hospitals.

A great number of points have been brought out by both the member for St Catharines and the member for York South showing us the erosion of our health care system in Mike Harris's Ontario today.

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): I too wish to commend the members for York South and St Catharines for reminding us that the red tape bills, all 17 of them, are designed by the Red Tape Review Commission, which is made up, you must acquiesce, of backbenchers from the far-right element of the Reform-Conservative Party that

we have here in Ontario. However innocent in appearance, those red tape bills, all 17 of them, are there to camouflage. They will tell you they wish to disentangle, they wish to make the system more expedient, more efficient and simpler, yet when you scrutinize what is proposed, you will see, for instance, that the increase of the workweek to 50 hours per week — they don't tell you that in their red bill strategy. They press the right button.

All 17 of these bills are part of their agenda. Some of them are good, some of them are not so good and some of them give a lot of power to the ministers. We have to caution people.

Coming back to the very heart of the health system, there is no question that per capita, on an individual basis, the government of Ontario is spending far less money than it used to. There are simply more people. As the demographics will attest, we have an aging population demanding, of course, more care, and this government has preferred the status quo. Yet they borrow money to give a tax break to those who need it the least. It's all part of their agenda.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for St Catharines, you have two minutes.

Mr Bradley: I want to thank the member for Hamilton Centre for again drawing to the attention of the House the circumstances confronting Hamilton and how they had to fight back against this government's agenda of closing hospitals. I well remember the fight over St Joe's Hospital in Hamilton and how it took a community effort to block the Conservative Party from closing that.

I remember my friend from Kitchener's impassioned remarks in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record about a year or a year and a half ago saying what would happen if St Mary's hospital closed, and I agree with him. He wanted Mike Harris to keep his promise not to close hospitals, because St Mary's hospital had meant a lot to my friend from Kitchener on a personal basis.

I also want to mention my friend from Kenora, who again reminds us of the Premier's famous words — he wants me to quote them again — "Certainly, Robert, I can guarantee you it is not my plan to close hospitals."

My friend from Lake Nipigon talks about the red tape bills. He says: "Watch out. Look under the rocks. See what's there. Is there a snake under those rocks? I can see that there's a hidden agenda."

In some cases they're pretty innocuous, but you have to study these bills carefully because these people over there are out to dismantle the health care system. If they have their way, we'll have an American system here. I wish I had my American flag with me that Mr Mahoney bought — he used to wave it in the House — an American flag, because it reminds me of the direction in which these people are heading, including the secret, confidential report, which we released today, where Mr Snobelen had some Americans, Miller Cook Co of Rochester, New York, running our education system, purportedly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Further debate.

2300

Mr Christopherson: I wish to advise the House that our leadoff time will be divided between myself and the members for Windsor-Riverside, London Centre and Cochrane South.

I want to pick up on a point that my colleague from Lake Nipigon mentioned in his two-minute response to the member for St Catharines. When he talked about the fact that the red tape commission was made up of what we would consider some of the most right-wing members of the government back benches, when he pointed out that this commission, although recognizing that a lot of these bills are relatively innocuous, although they have some problems within them that we'll mention throughout our comments — the fact is the government had chosen at the time it brought this bundle forward to set aside temporarily, with the emphasis on "temporarily," some of the more controversial — and that's putting it mildly — suggestions they had.

As the member for Lake Nipigon pointed out, and I think it's worth saying again, one of the things they recommended, this gang of right-wing backbenchers who had to be given something to do before they made mischief, what they came up with, was that the standard workweek in Ontario ought to be extended to 50 hours a week. First of all, you can be forced by law to work longer than you can now, and second, the point at which your overtime rate kicks in, if you don't have a collective agreement, is also extended.

We have made the point consistently on labour legislation that there's nothing this government has done that helps working people and their families. All it does is take away rights they have fought for, struggled for, earned and deserve. In some cases this government has rolled back rights that workers have had in Ontario for 50 years, rights that were originally given by Tory governments and upheld by subsequent Tory governments.

Yet this red tape commission is not satisfied with the attack on OPSEU workers, not satisfied with the attack on teachers that we now see in Bill 160, not satisfied with the attack on every public sector worker in this province under Bill 136, not satisfied with the attack on injured workers in Bill 99, not satisfied with attacking the rights of minimum-wage workers under Bill 49, not satisfied enough to give us the disgrace again of scabs being legalized in Ontario under Bill 7. No, no, all of that is not enough for this government. What some of them want to do is increase the workweek. It's despicable.

What else do they want to do? One of the things they suggested in terms of the environment — remember this is the government that brought out legislation, and we know how cute they are with naming things — and I'm paraphrasing, but I believe it was An Act to improve environmental protection, yadda, yadda, yadda. "Improve environmental protection" — what nonsense.

Every environmental group in this province was outraged by the attack on environmental standards. Yet this red tape commission was still not satisfied. That's not enough of an attack on the protection of our environment.

What did they recommend? They recommended replacing regulations on waste reduction and recycling for industrial, commercial and institutional establishments with — wait for it — voluntary guidelines. Give me a break. You've got the requirements in there because they protect the environment. This government replaces clear, enforceable guidelines and regulations — more important, regulations — with voluntary guidelines.

They wanted to relax and they still want to relax — this is still on the books in terms of things they're recommending that their cabinet do — regulations on the storage and disposal of PCBs. You can imagine how that sounds to a community like mine, where we just went through the horrendous disaster of having PVCs released into our atmosphere, where we've got hundreds of firefighters, dozens of hospital workers, and yes, still some citizens who are feeling the health effects of that. I can recall in my days on city council when we went through the whole issue of the storage of PCBs. What a very controversial issue. The only thing we ultimately had to rely on was that there were regulations that we could move, that we could look to and that we could enforce.

They want to narrow the corporate liability for cleanup of contaminated property. Again it rings true in Hamilton in terms of what we've seen at the Plastimet site — reducing requirements for posting notices on the Environmental Bill of Rights. All that is contained in this bundle of bills known as the red tape bills numbers 61 through 69. This one happens to be Bill 67, but the point of it is that all of these bills originated from the same place, from that group of backbenchers who are so far off to the right wing, so far off the beam that they recommended relaxing the regulations on the storage of PCBs and they recommended extending and lengthening the workweek to 50 hours a week. They probably still stand proud, and for all I know they're still in their weekly caucus meetings pushing for that hard right-wing agenda.

Then we come to Bill 67. We're talking about changing about 15 bills, at least 15, and repealing three others. A lot of them have to do with, again, removing authority away from cabinet to ministers, which is consistent with their thinking when we look back to Bill 26. If you recall, Bill 26 was in large part about taking away the authority of this Legislature to debate legislation in public. You removed the lawmaking power that we collectively have and shoved it into the cabinet room where there are no cameras, where there is no media, where there is no opportunity for an opposition debate. By the time this province is informed of how you've changed the laws of this land, it's too late. That's what you did in Bill 26 and that's why I think you're quite comfortable in downloading a lot more of the powers here. I suspect some of these might even make some sense. The problem is, you have so little credibility on the issue of transferring power that it's not a wonder everything you do in this regard is suspect.

While we're talking about health care and Bill 26, let's not lose sight of the health restructuring commission, that infamous body that moves across the province closing hospitals, as the member for St Catharines has repeated many times, breaking the pledge the Premier made: "I can guarantee you it's not my plan to close hospitals."

Therein lies, if you will, the evil genius in all of this, because the Minister of Health stands up and says: "I'm not closing a hospital. My Premier is not closing a hospital. Our cabinet is not closing a hospital. They're doing it. It's that commission." When somebody says, "You ought to do something," he says, "The law prohibits me from doing anything about it." Of course, we know that the commission was a creation of this government under Bill 26, that the law they hide behind was created in Bill 26 and that the whole purpose was to provide exactly that, a shield where they could deflect the criticism, or thought they could.

2310

The reality is at that the end of the day, when your health restructuring commission removes through each of our communities — they're in Hamilton now and we're expecting an announcement, unfortunately, very soon. If they close one hospital in our community, after we've done two thorough studies and showed that if you allow us to reinvest the money saved by restructuring, we can maintain all those hospitals and continue to have one of the best health care systems in this province, make no mistake: We won't be blaming the health restructuring commission; we're going to be blaming you and we're going to be holding this government accountable for every hospital in Hamilton and every other hospital across this province that you shut down, particularly in the absence of an announcement that all the money you're saving will be reinvested. We haven't heard that yet and without that you've broken your promise big-time. People are not going to forget.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Cochrane South): I'm going to limit my comments to a couple of points in regard to Bill 67. As the member for Hamilton, my good friend Mr Christopherson, just mentioned, this particular bill, Bill 67, deals with the amendment of a number of acts, everything from the Ambulance Act all the way up to the Public Hospitals Act. In short, this bill should actually be retitled when you take a look at where the government is at.

One of the reasons it should be retitled is because what this act really does is two things. The government is really good at giving long titles that talk about what they're trying to do in the legislation. I would take a stab at inventing a name. It would go something like this: Bill 67, An Act to impose user fees on the population of Ontario to give the power to the Minister of Health to impose user fees on everything from ambulance services to the kinds of services you receive in nursing homes and homes for the aged around the province of Ontario and to allow the private sector to intrude into what is a public health care system. I think that would be a better title, because really that bill does exactly that.

The bill takes away from the cabinet certain powers it has now to prescribe fees and regulations when it comes to a number of different activities in the health care sector,

and puts that power squarely in the hands of the Minister of Health. That's a scary thought when you figure that this Minister of Health has an agenda that I think a lot of Ontarians are starting to increasingly have large problems with, not only the question about the cuts he's doing in health care and the cuts he's doing specifically in the hospital sector, but that this government is going down a path that is going to allow the private sector, over time, to intrude in what is a public health care system. One of the things you're doing in this bill is giving the minister the ability to do that.

If you take a look at the compendium that comes along with the bill — this is the basis of Bill 67, and I think it's worth noting. The compendium to the bill says, "The Minister of Health has identified necessary legislative regulatory changes that include routine items to remove impediments to business or improve government efficiencies."

Why does the government want to remove impediments to business when it comes to introducing business in what is a public health care system? They're doing it is because they want to allow their friends, the people in the private sector, to move into business opportunities in what is a public health care system.

When the people catch up to what you guys are doing, you'll be lucky to win as dog catchers in your own ridings, because one of the things we understand in province of Ontario and in this country we call Canada is that one of the better things we have going for us is our public system of health care. We in Canada and in Ontario know that if you're sick, they don't look at your wallet before you walk into the hospital. The doctor doesn't ask you, "Let me see the limit on your credit card," before they roll you into the cardiovascular wing of Sudbury Memorial Hospital. They say, "What is your condition?" and based on your condition you will receive services, paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario, so there is no impediment to getting health care based on how much money you make or who you know within the private sector or in government circles.

One of the things you're doing in this bill, as you did in Bill 26 and as you're doing in your policies at the Ministry of Health, is allowing the private sector to intrude into what is a public health care system. I for one, as a New Democrat, am not going to stand idly by and watch you people introduce —

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: The member across the way said, "He's a socialist." If being a socialist means I care about making sure the people of the province can access health care services, not based on what they've got in their pocket but by their need, by damn I'm proud to be a socialist. What the heck are you? It's as simple as that.

I would simply say this in the minute I have left: This bill should be renamed. It should be called an intrusion by the private sector into the health care system, an ability for the Minister of Health to introduce user fees on all kinds of services within the health care field. To name that bill such would be a lot saner than calling it what they're trying to call it, saying it's only removing red tape.

Mr Wayne Lessard (Windsor-Riverside): I want to follow up on the comments made by my colleague from Cochrane South and speak somewhat about the fees that are going to be imposed by Bill 67, and who is going to determine those fees and what those fees are going to be charged for.

My friend is quite right that what this bill does is enable the charging of fees for a lot of services that up until now there hadn't been any fees charged for. A couple of those areas are with respect to the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

This is an act I have some familiarity with because my wife happens to be an environmental health inspector with the Windsor-Essex district health unit. She has some concern about what this government's agenda is, especially with respect to their changes in Bill 136 and the downloading of health care on to local municipalities and the downloading of responsibilities under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. She has some concerns about what municipal councillors are going to be able to decide as services that are going to be offered under the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

That's an act that prescribes some mandatory inspection programs. Some of those programs are things that involve community sanitation, control of communicable diseases, preventive dentistry, family health, home care services, nutrition, public health education, and of course there's this catch-all phrase, "additional health programs, as prescribed under the regulations." None of those things that are mandatory programs are programs my wife is directly involved in. Those are ones that have been referred to in the download numbers we all got a copy of, somewhat later than our Tory colleagues, and have had to try to sift our way through, along with our municipal councillors locally.

Non-mandatory programs are going to be downloaded on to municipalities. They're going to be expected to pick up the bills for these sorts of things. That really brings me to the changes that are proposed in Bill 67. One of the little changes that is prescribed in this bill is a change to section 58.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act. It's an addition to section 58; it's a new section. It says, "A board of health may charge fees for such services and in such amounts as the minister may approve."

That little section is going to permit the boards of health for local municipalities to begin to charge user fees for those sorts of inspection duties that were previously provided by inspectors without charge.

2320

One of the things my wife does is to go around to inspect restaurants to ensure there are no public health nuisances there; that there are no possibilities of contagious diseases being spread; to ensure that those people who are handling food aren't contaminating those foods and possibly leading to an outbreak of food poisoning, something I think all of us here, whoever eats in restaurants and anybody who happens to be watching, should be

pretty concerned about. Restaurants don't charge for that sort of inspection these days, but this change to the legislation is going to permit the charging of restaurants and other places that are going to be subject to these sorts of inspections to have to pay for them in the future.

This is just another one of those little areas where this government says that on the one hand we are going to offer people like small businesses, restaurant owners, for example, a tax break, but on the other hand we're going to permit boards of health, which are local bodies appointed by the government that happens to be in power, whatever fees that they may be able to charge to provide those services.

Therefore, any advantage that may be achieved by the granting of a tax cut is going to be lost. That's something I think people here should be aware of and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to raise that tonight.

Mrs Marion Boyd (London Centre): Several of the speakers tonight have talked about the fact that there are a series of bills that are designed to do more or less the same thing — the group of backbenchers that have looked at this issue — to cut red tape. It's really important that as we are doing this work, and we have a number of these bills to go through so it's going to be important for all of us to keep in mind — when we cut red tape we sometimes cut some of the measures of accountability, and that's the part of this bill I want to talk about tonight.

We need to make it very clear that when we were the government we found very often, those of us in cabinet, that the volume of regulations that had to come through cabinet, through the Lieutenant Governor in Council, was quite remarkable. Certainly it is a temptation for any group of ministers gathered around a cabinet table, when they have regulation after regulation coming through for their approval, to perhaps ask themselves whether it's really all that important for ministers to know about that. Wouldn't it be enough for the minister who is charged with the responsibility in the ministry to have looked at these and approved them? Why does it need to go through cabinet?

In this bill, Bill 67, most of the changes that occur, except for the three acts that are being completely repealed, are issues around what needs to be passed by the cabinet and what can be relegated to the minister. This is a pretty key question, and it's going to be a question that will arise again and again as we go through these red tape bills.

In a parliamentary democracy that is based on a cabinet system, why would so many regulations have to go through that cabinet system? This didn't happen by happenstance. This happened because of the very theory of a cabinet in a parliamentary government. The cabinet is the government. The cabinet as a group of people, as a collectivity, is responsible for the decisions of the government.

People hear terms like "cabinet solidarity," but what cabinet solidarity really means in this system of government is that when the cabinet passes a regulation or a piece of policy, every single member of that cabinet becomes responsible for that decision. As more and more of the work of the cabinet gets relegated to individual ministers, where is the obligation on the part of the cabinet to maintain government solidarity? Well, it isn't there.

It is very easy to cut loose a minister and say, "The government didn't make this decision, the minister made this decision." That's one of the things we have to look at as we look through these red tape bills. Is it appropriate for a minister to exercise some of the powers that this bill and many of the other red tape bills are relegating simply to ministers? What is the danger to our notion of cabinet accountability, cabinet solidarity?

I am not talking about the areas in this bill or any of the others where it is simply a question of prescribing forms or applications. We all know, who have been in government, that work is done in the legislation and regulations committee anyway when it comes to cabinet. Now it won't even necessarily have to go to any committee. The bureaucrats in a ministry will bring forward that material to a minister, and the minister is under no obligation to make a cabinet submission, to make a regulation submission and to go through a cabinet that vets those regulations.

When you have, for example, the prescription of forms, if there is an error made, it's not as likely to get caught. I know, having sat on the legislation and regulations committee — and I've got to tell you it's not the most stimulating experience one can have in government.

Mr Lessard: I enjoyed it.

Mrs Boyd: Yes, my friend from Windsor-Riverside really did enjoy it. He read absolutely every regulation and he is a good example of what happens, the mistakes that get caught, the errors that get caught through that process. In fact my friend from Windsor-Riverside I can remember caught several regulations I had signed and wanted to put through and was able to show that they would have exactly the opposite effect to what I had expected they would have and to what I was advised by people in the ministry they would have.

We saw an example of this. Remember way back when, when you first started, all of a sudden a regulation on social assistance crept through. It crept through the Lieutenant Governor in Council process. Everybody was asleep at the switch, with a regulatory change which in one fell swoop would have cut at least 115,000 people off family benefits. "It was a mistake," the minister said. "I didn't know what I was signing," and obviously neither did the secretary of cabinet. Even when the Lieutenant Governor in Council makes those decisions there can be mistakes. So think about the possibility of error with no one vetting it, no one assuming responsibility for it except one minister, when these things are not going through the Lieutenant Governor in Council process.

That's something that people to be very wary of. We experienced a number of occasions when regulations actually escaped the eagle eye of my friend from Windsor-Riverside, went to cabinet, and another cabinet minister recognized the effect that putting that regulation into place

would have on the work of another ministry and we had to rethink our position.

Red tape is one thing, but cutting lines of accountability and scrutiny is another. We need to be very careful in this regard.

I'm only going to talk about the ones where I have a concern. I want you to know I have a concern that this bill changes the Public Hospitals Act and now makes it possible for a minister all by himself or herself to decide whether or not a building will be approved for the use of a public hospital.

2330

Now, the creation of a public hospital, it seems to me, is a very big community interest, and if you have a cabinet form of government, it ought to be one of those collective decisions that cabinet makes. What if the minister decides the building is going to be used as a public hospital and the finance minister finds out about it five months down the line and says: "Hey, who made this decision? This changes the flow of money. This should have been my decision."

This is the whole purpose of doing it between them, so you can make sure the decision made in one ministry is not going to affect the operation and the accountability of another ministry. I would really caution this government that what you call red tape very often is that kind of accountability.

Let's look, for example, at the whole issue of the changes in the Mental Health Act in this bill. It takes away from cabinet, from the Lieutenant Governor in cabinet, the power of making regulations prescribing the amounts that are going to be paid to psychiatric institutions in this province and hand over that power solely to the minister. What's the problem with that? It is a lack of accountability. The minister may indeed in effect make all the recommendations that come forward on this, but it is the decision of the whole cabinet to decide whether that is in the best public interest.

When we look at some of the other areas of this, it is very important to understand the difference in accountability. If you look, for example, at the Homes for Special Care Act, the power to establish homes for special care, the power to approve the buildings or other places for special care, no longer is a cabinet decision. It becomes the power of a minister to license a special care home. Cabinet no longer decides what the licensing cost or the application cost is for that.

This could be an extremely important question when it comes to the care particularly of psychiatric patients but also of the developmentally delayed as they are being deinstitutionalized. The whole issue of homes for special care and their appropriateness in the community is a community interest. This is a matter of public interest.

I want you to know that we in no way object to the repeal of the three acts being repealed. They are acts that were put in place for good reason at the time they were put in place, but they are no longer the kind of act necessary for us to have comfort in the public interest.

The War Veterans Burial Act, for example: I confess I had to look this up, because it was not something I was familiar with. It may well be one of these acts that has had very little meaning for some time. Let me read it to you:

"In the event of the death of any person who was an indigent person and who was a member of Her Majesty's naval, military or air forces in active service during any war and the burial was provided by and paid for from the Last Post Fund, the municipality in which the person resided at the time of his or her death shall pay the expenses of such burial, but not exceeding the sum of $15, to the fund upon proof of such burial and demand for payment made by a properly accredited officer of the fund."

I'm not sure whether the Last Post Fund is still operating. That's something I haven't had the research capacity to find out, but we all know that a $15 chargeback to the fund from a municipality would not be worth the effort to collect it.

Similarly, the second part of it is a $100 fee from the workers' compensation payments for burial — again, probably not a very important issue.

The Hypnosis Act was put in place when hypnosis was a very new process. It was put in place to try and protect the public interest, but there are now many other ways in which that public interest is protected, so of course it should be repealed.

The Cancer Remedies Act, similar to the Hypnosis Act, was put into place at a time when we were only just developing some of the expertise in dealing with cancers and there were real fears about spurious cures and spurious treatments, in fact treatments that might be harmful. One of the issues we see here is the removal of an act that is no longer necessary because of some of the other regulatory measures in place.

Our major objection to these measures around changing the authority for making decisions really centres on how we maintain accountability. If a minister is going to assume all these new responsibilities as a result of these red tape bills, how are we as the general public going to be able to hold that minister accountable? Indeed, how are his or her own colleagues going to hold him or her accountable?

There are, of course, ways in which that happens. Obviously, ministers are always very vulnerable to a change of mind on the part of the Premier of the day and certainly, in order to maintain their own best interests — not the public best interest but their own best interest — may make decisions that will maintain their position as opposed to maintaining the public interest.

I think that's a worry. Particularly when we're talking about setting fees, talking about new kinds of regulations in a rapidly changing, rapidly restructured health system, do we really know what we are doing when we put the power in the hands of a single minister with no scrutiny by his or her colleagues and with no committee process to ensure that all the bases have been checked? I think we need to be concerned about that.

There is nothing in this act that makes us particularly concerned about an abuse of power. It's the overall effect of more and more power being concentrated in the hands of the ministers. That is not what this government talked about; this government tried to say there was too much bureaucratic power. But when you transfer all the power into the hands of a minister, you are at the mercy of the bureaucrats, because no one else has any scrutiny of the advice that is given. It is very important to remember that when you concentrate that power and put it entirely on to a minister, that minister will only have the information and the advice that come forward from the ministry. You will find you have a ministry-driven process in which the accountability of elected representatives begins to be lost.

The effect of all these red tape bills will be a cumulative effect of increasing the power of bureaucrats, all to save the cabinet 20 minutes now and then as they go through passing the regulations and scrutinizing the work of their colleagues. I say that as we go through these bills, we should be looking very carefully at which of the particular changes being proposed concern us the most. That will be the job of the critics, to look very carefully at each of these bills to see where that changing of the balance of power from the cabinet, from the government, to a minister will have that effect.

We're not going to talk any longer on this bill, although there's a lot of time left on the clock, because there's another piece of legislation we want to get through tonight. But one of the things I would like the government to think about as we go through the next — well, it's not quite 100 bills, but quite a lot of this so-called red tape cutting. I would really like some consideration on the part of the government of the overall cumulative effect of what is being proposed, because I think in the long run it's going to have a very deleterious effect on our democratic process. I think we will rue the day when we take such measures to concentrate power in the hands of ministers and therefore hand ourselves over much more to the power of the bureaucrats.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Hudak has moved third reading of Bill 67. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It is carried.

Resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

2340

RED TAPE REDUCTION ACT (MINISTRY OF FINANCE), 1997

LOI DE 1997 VISANT À RÉDUIRE LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES AU MINISTÈRE DES FINANCES

Ms Isabel Bassett (St Andrew-St Patrick): I move second reading of Bill 115, An Act to reduce red tape by amending or repealing certain statutes administered by the Ministry of Finance and by making complementary amendments to other statutes / Projet de loi 115, Loi visant à réduire les formalités administratives en modifiant ou en abrogeant certaines lois dont l'application relève du ministère des Finances et en apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

I'll be very brief tonight because I want to give time to members on the other side of the House. I want to say, however, just to lay the groundwork for what this bill does, that Bill 115 would deliver on our commitment made in the Common Sense Revolution to cut red tape, create more efficient government and preserve consumer protection. From that point of view, it's long overdue.

By eliminating unnecessary rules, we are reducing not only the cost of complying with regulations but we are also enhancing the financial services industry's ability to improve customer services and to increase access to capital for Ontario's businesses.

Let's be clear that red tape means unnecessary paperwork and regulatory duplication. Red tape does absolutely nothing to improve consumer protection. In fact, red tape stands in the way of improved customer services. It increases costs for both consumers and businesses and it kills jobs.

I want to say that the people of Ontario told us to cut red tape to help stimulate private sector growth. In the Common Sense Revolution, as I mentioned, we made a commitment to do so. Bill 115 is doing just that, by reducing red tape in the financial services and tax administration sectors while preserving consumer protection.

Thank you. Now to the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Comments or questions? No? Further debate?

Mr Frank Miclash (Kenora): I don't think any party can really disagree with the cutting of red tape.

Applause.

Mr Miclash: Why is everybody so lively at this time of the evening?

When we take a close look at what Bill 115 actually does, we find out that the bill actually gives the Premier and the various ministers the power to impose new fees. We often think back to what the Premier, Mike Harris, had to say about new fees and user fees. Back when he was talking about user fees, he called them a tax. We had the Premier saying, "There will be no new taxes," but what we see through this bill is the power to allow the Premier, the people in his corner office and the ministers to impose these new fees without much notice, without much input from the general public or from the Legislature itself. What we see here in this bill is a way that the government can sneak in these fees and increase user fees on the public. We'll watch these fees go up much quicker, allowing both the ministers and the Premier to do this.

It's an opportunity to impose fees on anything from ambulance services to any number of health care services. As well, it allows the government to dump a good number of the costs on to municipalities. Bill 115 allows them to move in and dump those costs down on to our municipalities.

Very briefly, this is a bill we cannot disagree with in terms of cutting red tape, but it certainly allows both the Premier and the ministers to bring forth and impose fees,

giving them new powers as the Premier and cabinet to do this. With that, I'll conclude my remarks.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments? The Chair recognizes the member for St Catharines.

Interjection: Sit down.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Somebody said, "Sit down." That means I want to stand up for a while.

I just wanted to ask the member the question of whether this bill had anything to do with the outrageous gas prices we're experiencing in St Catharines today.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments? The member for Kenora has up to two minutes to respond. No? Further debate?

Mr Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon): Simply put, Bill 115 changes 42 acts. Again simply put, it deals mainly with form, but it does give the Minister of Finance authority, power, to delegate or to approve, rather than going through the process of regulation. High time; long overdue; cooperation of all three parties; better service to the clientele. There are 16 different client service groups represented, from the banks to the trust companies to the other financial institutions.

Of course, it does amend the Mining Act thoroughly. Every time there's a form and a regulation, it won't be as burdensome as it once was.

Suffice it to say that we shall support, in its entirety, the long-awaited Bill 115, for it is a step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Bradley: I'm going to ask the member just one question, and he can answer very briefly if he wishes to do so. Is he not surprised that it took this long for the government House leader to call this piece of legislation for consideration in this House?

Mr Bud Wildman (Algoma): In response to my colleague from Lake Nipigon, I would just like to say succinctly "ditto."

The Acting Speaker: Ms Bassett has moved second reading of Bill 115. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It is carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? It is agreed.

Mr David Turnbull (York Mills): Mr Speaker, it being close to 12 of the clock, I propose that we adjourn.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Turnbull has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It is carried.

The House adjourned at 2351.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon / L'hon Hilary M. Weston
Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Chris Stockwell
Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
Clerk Assistant / Greffière adjointe: Deborah Deller
Clerks at the Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma	Wildman, Bud (ND)
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Michael A. (L)
Beaches-Woodbine	Lankin, Frances (ND)
Brampton North / -Nord	Spina, Joseph (PC)
Brampton South / -Sud	Clement, Tony (PC)
Brant-Haldimand	Preston, Peter L. (PC)
Brantford	Johnson, Ron (PC)
Bruce	Fisher, Barbara (PC)
Burlington South / -Sud	**Jackson, Hon / L'hon Cameron** (PC) Minister without Portfolio (seniors issues) / ministre sans portefeuille (affaires des pernonnes âgées)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)
Carleton	**Sterling, Hon / L'hon Norman W.** (PC) Minister of Environment and Energy / ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Énergie
Carleton East / -Est	Morin, Gilles E. (L)
Chatham-Kent	Carroll, Jack (PC)
Cochrane North / -Nord	Wood, Len (ND)
Cochrane South / -Sud	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Cornwall	Cleary, John C. (L)
Don Mills	**Johnson, Hon / L'hon David** (PC) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, government House leader / président du Conseil de gestion, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Dovercourt	Silipo, Tony (ND)
Downsview	Castrilli, Annamarie (L)
Dufferin-Peel	Tilson, David (PC)
Durham Centre / -Centre	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Durham East / -Est	O'Toole, John R. (PC)
Durham West / -Ouest	**Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet** (PC) Minister of Community and Social Services / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Durham-York	Munro, Julia (PC)
Eglinton	**Saunderson, Hon / L'hon William** (PC) Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism / ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et du Tourisme
Elgin	North, Peter (Ind)
Essex-Kent	Hoy, Pat (L)
Essex South / -Sud	Crozier, Bruce (L)
Etobicoke-Humber	Ford, Douglas B. (PC)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Kells, Morley (PC)
Etobicoke-Rexdale	Hastings, John (PC)
Etobicoke West / -Ouest	**Stockwell, Hon / L'hon Chris** (PC) Speaker / président
Fort William	McLeod, Lyn (L)
Fort York	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Frontenac-Addington	Vankoughnet, Bill (PC)
Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)
Guelph	Elliott, Brenda (PC)
Halton Centre / -Centre	Young, Terence H. (PC)
Halton North / -Nord	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Hamilton Centre / -Centre	Christopherson, David (ND)
Hamilton East / -Est	Agostino, Dominic (L)
Hamilton Mountain	Pettit, Trevor (PC)
Hamilton West / -Ouest	Ross, Lillian (PC)
Hastings-Peterborough	Danford, Harry (PC)
High Park-Swansea	Shea, Derwyn (PC)
Huron	Johns, Helen (PC)
Kenora	Miclash, Frank (L)
Kingston and The Islands / Kingston et Les Îles	Gerretsen, John (L)
Kitchener	Wettlaufer, Wayne (PC)
Kitchener-Wilmot	Leadston, Gary L. (PC)
Lake Nipigon / Lac-Nipigon	Pouliot, Gilles (ND)
Lambton	Beaubien, Marcel (PC)
Lanark-Renfrew	Jordan, W. Leo (PC)
Lawrence	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
Leeds-Grenville	**Runciman, Hon / L'hon Robert W.** (PC) Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services / solliciteur général et ministre des Services correctionnels
Lincoln	Sheehan, Frank (PC)
London Centre / -Centre	Boyd, Marion (ND)
London North / -Nord	**Cunningham, Hon / L'hon Dianne** (PC) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
London South / -Sud	Wood, Bob (PC)
Markham	**Tsubouchi, Hon / L'hon David H.** (PC) Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations / ministre de la Consommation et du Commerce
Middlesex	Smith, Bruce (PC)
Mississauga East / -Est	DeFaria, Carl (PC)
Mississauga North / -Nord	**Snobelen, Hon / L'hon John** (PC) Minister of Education and Training / ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation
Mississauga South / -Sud	Marland, Margaret (PC)
Mississauga West / -Ouest	**Sampson, Hon / L'hon Rob** (PC) Minister without Portfolio (privatization) / ministre sans portefeuille (privatisation)
Muskoka-Georgian Bay / Muskoka-Baie-Georgienne	Grimmett, Bill (PC)
Nepean	Baird, John R. (PC)
Niagara Falls	Maves, Bart (PC)
Niagara South / -Sud	Hudak, Tim (PC)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nickel Belt	Laughren, Floyd (ND)
Nipissing	**Harris, Hon / L'hon Michael D.** (PC) Premier and President of the Executive Council / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif
Norfolk	Barrett, Toby (PC)
Northumberland	Galt, Doug (PC)
Oakville South / -Sud	Carr, Gary (PC)
Oakwood	Colle, Mike (L)
Oriole	Caplan, David (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)
Ottawa East / -Est	Grandmaître, Bernard (L)
Ottawa-Rideau	Guzzo, Garry J. (PC)
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Dalton (L) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Ottawa West / -Ouest	Cullen, Alex (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)
Parkdale	Ruprecht, Tony (L)
Parry Sound	**Eves, Hon / L'hon Ernie L.** (PC) Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance / vice-premier ministre, ministre des Finances
Perth	Johnson, Bert (PC)
Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)
Port Arthur	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Prescott and Russell / Prescott et Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)
Prince Edward-Lennox-South Hastings / Prince EdwardLennox-Hastings-Sud	Fox, Gary (PC)
Quinte	Rollins, E.J. Douglas (PC)
Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Renfrew North / -Nord	Conway, Sean G. (L)
Riverdale	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
S-D-G & East Grenville / S-D-G et Grenville-Est	Villeneuve, Hon / L'hon Noble (PC) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
St Andrew-St Patrick	Bassett, Isabel (PC)
St Catharines	Bradley, James J. (L)
St Catharines-Brock	Froese, Tom (PC)
St George-St David	Leach, Hon / L'hon Al (PC) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Sarnia	Boushy, Dave (PC)
Sault Ste Marie / Sault-Sainte-Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)
Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Gerry (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Newman, Dan (PC)
Scarborough East / -Est	Gilchrist, Steve (PC)
Scarborough-Ellesmere	**Mushinski, Hon / L'hon Marilyn** (PC) Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation / ministre des Affaires civiques, de la Culture et des Loisirs
Scarborough North / -Nord	Curling, Alvin (L)
Scarborough West / -Ouest	Brown, Jim (PC)
Simcoe Centre / -Centre	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)
Simcoe East / -Est	McLean, Allan K. (PC)
Simcoe West / -Ouest	**Wilson, Hon / L'hon Jim** (PC) Minister of Health / ministre de la Santé
Sudbury	Bartolucci, Rick (L)
Sudbury East / -Est	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Timiskaming	Ramsay, David (L)
Victoria-Haliburton	**Hodgson, Hon / L'hon Chris** (PC) Minister of Natural Resources, Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Waterloo North / -Nord	**Witmer, Hon / L'hon Elizabeth** (PC) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Welland-Thorold	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Wentworth East / -Est	Doyle, Ed (PC)
Wentworth North / -Nord	Skarica, Toni (PC)
Willowdale	**Harnick, Hon / L'hon Charles** (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Wilson Heights	Kwinter, Monte (L)
Windsor-Riverside	Lessard, Wayne (ND)
Windsor-Sandwich	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
Windsor-Walkerville	Duncan, Dwight (L)
York Centre / -Centre	**Palladini, Hon / L'hon Al** (PC) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
York East / -Est	Parker, John L. (PC)
York Mills	Turnbull, David (PC)
York-Mackenzie	Klees, Frank (PC)
Yorkview	Sergio, Mario (L)
York South / -Sud	Kennedy, Gerard (L)

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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